BUSINESS / B1

Peso may breach 48:$1 early 2007, says Singaporean bank

WORLD / A20

Defiant Iran vows to press on with nuke program despite UN sanctions

METRO / A17

Robbers disarm 12 guards, rob QC mall after midnight

WORLD / A19

James Brown, the Godfather of Soul, dies at 73

Probe of other Abra political killings urged

By Frank Cimatu and Leoncio Balbin Jr.
Inquirer Northern Luzon

BANGUED, ABRA—THE FAMILY OF MURDERED Rep. Luis "Chito" Bersamin Jr. tried to celebrate "noche buena" the way he would have wanted it on Christmas.

"When he was alive, there were lots of food and

PROBE/ A8

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
Tuesday, December 26, 2006 ★★ 4 sections / Vol. 22 / No. 18 P18 website: inquirer.net

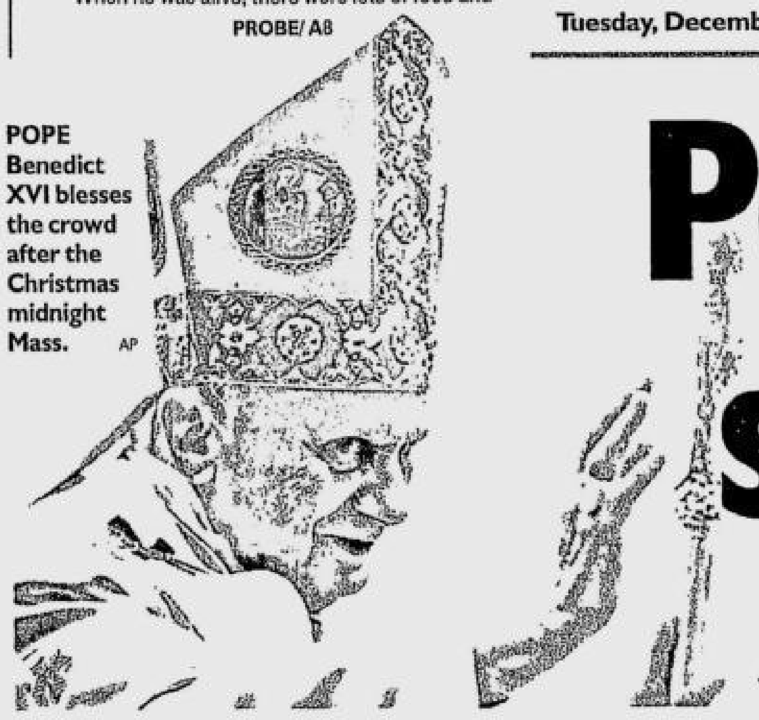
Art of the re-gift gains acceptance

NEW YORK—FOR Christmas this year, New York comedienne Margaret Champagne is giving her boyfriend's parents 2-year-old candles that had been gathering dust under her bed.

"Unless they run it

ART/ A7

ITO ANG USO NGAYON-RECYCLING!



POPE Benedict XVI blesses the crowd after the Christmas midnight Mass. AP

Pope: World needs savior all the more

Also calls for end to conflicts across globe

VATICAN CITY—IN HIS Christmas Day address, Pope Benedict XVI on Monday said that the "post-modern age" needed a savior all the more because of "insidious threats to personal and moral integrity."

"In this post-modern age, perhaps he needs a savior all the more, since the society in which he lives has become more complex and the threats to his personal and moral integrity have become more insidious," the Pope said in his "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) message from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica.

Benedict asked rhetorically whether "humanity which has reached the moon and Mars and is prepared to conquer the universe" still had need of a savior.

"This humanity of the 21st century appears as a sure and self-sufficient master of its own destiny," he said.

"So it would seem, yet this is not the case. People continue to die of hunger and thirst, disease and poverty, in this age of plenty and of unbridled consumerism."

The 79-year-old Pontiff mentioned those subjected to enslavement and exploitation, victims of racial and religious hatred or discrimination, terrorism and other violence "at a time when everyone invokes and acclaims progress, solidarity and peace for all."

He asked: "And what of those

POPE/ A7

A different Christmas for 'Nicole' and Smith

By Tarra V. Quismundo

THEIR LIVES SEPARATE BUT INtertwined, "Nicole" and her convicted rapist Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith pondered on their respective struggles as Christmas Day ran its course yesterday—she on moving on and he on getting out of jail.

Nicole, 23, was caught in the ambivalence of making merry in the midst of an uncertain future. Smith, 21, spent his first Christmas in detention, in the company of American and Filipino guards and showered with gifts from his sympathizers.

"Last year on Christmas, what was on my mind was the thought of what would happen to my case. Now, what I am thinking about is what happens to me next. I have realized that it's really not that easy to move on," said the Filipino woman who won the historic rape case against the US Marine on Dec. 4.

Nicole spent the high point of the holiday season with her siblings at her family's house in Metro Manila, and shared a *noche buena* featuring the staples—spaghetti and ham, as well

A DIFFERENT/ A8

VILLAGERS offer prayers and candles on Christmas Eve for victims of the deadly mudslide brought by Supertyphoon "Reming" to what was once a populated area in Barangay Busay in Daraga, Albay. AFP

Candle procession for typhoon victims

DARAGA, ALBAY—CHRISTMAS on Monday brought little cheer to the residents of Busay village here, which was still grieving for the loved ones and homes lost in a massive mudslide barely a month ago.

Instead of celebrating in their homes with friends and family, like the rest of the Philippines, the survivors of the typhoon-sparked mudslides huddled in tents in a ruined school that had been converted into an evacuation center in the storm-ravaged Bicol region.

Busay was just one of many villages that was buried when Supertyphoon "Reming" hit Bicol on Nov. 30, bringing heavy rains that mixed with the ash on the slopes of nearby Mayon Volcano to form deadly mudslides.

The mudslides swept down the slopes of the volcano, leaving more than a thousand people dead and missing.

At the evacuation center, farmer Joseph Semanas, 38, his wife and three children busied themselves clearing the weeds

CANDLE PROCESSION/ A4

Mr. & Mrs. Santa serve poor

By Romulo O. Ponte
Inquirer Southern Luzon

CALAMBA CITY—DESPITE A TERRIBLE ACcident on Christmas Day last year, a philanthropist who prefers to remain anonymous continues his mission of providing "noche buena" gifts for the poor in selected areas in Laguna, an undertaking he started in 1995.

The millionaire commercial trader-lawyer and his wife have been feeding the underprivileged and "sharing grace they have received from God" for almost 10 years.

Most of the poor families, who have received the goodies and savored the tasty food, have no idea who have been playing Mr. and Mrs. Santa in their lives for several years now.

The especially packed bags consist of a few kilos of "fancy" rice, cheese, spaghetti, corned beef, sugar, coffee and milk.

Each year, the couple would distribute about a thousand of these noche buena bags to parishes and towns, like Barangays Pansol and Aplaya in Calamba City, Pangil and Victoria towns and another town in Quezon province.

The couple started this generous tradition

MR. & MRS./ A8

Girl Scouts' coin banks send displaced members to school

By Ma. Diosa Labiste
Inquirer Visayas

ILOILO CITY—A THOUSAND BAMBOO COIN banks will bring holiday cheer to 98 Girl Scouts and their families affected by the oil spill in Guimaras.

Since October, bamboo coin banks, measuring some 15 inches each, have been distributed to 1,800 Girl Scout troops in Iloilo province and city. They are being filled up with coins that, if put all together, will help the Guimaras Girl Scouts stay in school.

Zenaida Mabugat, associate member of the Iloilo Girl Scout Council and former regional social welfare director, said the fund drive was organized when they learned that many girl students had stopped or could hardly go to school because their parents had lost their main source of livelihood—fishing.

The oil spill, caused by the Aug. 11 sinking in choppy waters of oil tanker MT Solar I that was carrying 2.1 million liters of bunker fuel

GIRL SCOUTS'/ A8

A PRIEST walks inside the Church of the Nativity believed to be the birthplace of Jesus Christ, during Christmas celebrations in the West Bank town of Bethlehem. AP

200 OFWs dispel gloom in Bethlehem

BETHLEHEM, WEST BANK—THOUSANDS of people joined by marching bands, clergymen in magenta skullcaps and children dressed as Santa Claus celebrated Christmas Eve in the center of Bethlehem on Sunday, doing their best to dispel the gloom hovering over Jesus' traditional birthplace.

Most were local residents or Christian Arabs from neighboring Israel, with a sprinkling of foreign tourists. The only large foreign contingent was made up of around 200 Filipino Catholics who work in Israel.

The overseas Filipino workers made the short trip to Bethlehem with their spiritual leader, Father Angelo. The small, bubbly priest wearing a brown frock predicted 3,000 Filipinos would arrive in Bethlehem on Christmas Day.

"It's Christmas, it's time for joy, hope and peace, and happiness for all," he said.

Matt Lafontaine, a 21-year-old university student from Plymouth, Minnesota, was overwhelmed by the experience of being in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve.

"It hasn't really set in that I am here in Bethlehem where everything happened so many thousand years ago," Lafontaine said. "It's really exciting. It's just starting to set in. It's surreal."

In an annual tradition, Bethlehem's resi-

OFWs FLOCK/ A6

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Northern and Eastern Luzon will have mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers while Mindanao will be cloudy with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms.

SOURCE: PAGASA

COMPILED BY LAW DE GUZMAN, INQUIRER RESEARCH 12/25/06

Metro Manila	Cloudy with Rains	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Cloudy with Rains	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Cloudy with Rains	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Cloudy with Rains	Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Cloudy with Rains	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Cloudy with Rains	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

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Garci case not closed, says Biazon

By TJ Burgonio

DESPITE THE DISMISSAL OF PERJURY AND FALSIfication charges against him, Virgilio Garcillano cannot rest easy just yet because of the still to be concluded Senate inquiry into the wiretapping scandal involving the purported conspiracy between the then election commissioner and President Macapagal-Arroyo to rig the 2004 polls in her favor.

"It's not over yet. The 'Garci' hearing is not yet closed," Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, chair of the investigating committee on national defense, said yesterday in a phone interview.

Biazon said the committee was not even close to wrapping up its inquiry, was planning to invite a number of witnesses, and was merely waiting for "the right time and conditions" to resume the hearings.

He said there were "still a lot of witnesses that can provide what the truth is in this case."

Besides, the senator said, the dismissed charges against Garcillano were different and separate from the subject of the Senate inquiry. "It has nothing to do with the case of election fraud, as can be gleaned from the 'Garci' tapes," he said.

Seat in the House

Garcillano, who is reportedly eyeing a seat in the House of Representatives, has voiced hope that the Department of Justice's dismissal of the charges lodged by opposition lawmakers would end the scandal that had hounded him and the Arroyo administration since it broke out in June 2005.

The scandal, spawned by purported tapped conversations between Ms Arroyo and Garcillano suggesting that they were conspiring to commit election fraud, triggered calls for her resignation and attempts to impeach her.

In a Nov. 14 resolution released to the media only last week, the DOJ cleared Garcillano of 21 counts of perjury and falsification of passport charges filed by Sen. Panfilo Lacson and 19 congressmen in March and April.

In throwing out the charges, the DOJ discredited a note verbale from Singapore and the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas report confirming Garcillano's travel abroad, and said the lawmakers had failed to prove that his statements at a House inquiry were made under oath.

Resource persons

Having initially failed to compel their appearance, the committee continues to seek lawyer Samuel Ong, the first to claim to have copies of the "Garci" tapes; Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon, who was mentioned in the tapes; and military intelligence agent T/Sgt. Vidal Doble, who allegedly played a key role in the wiretapping.

It has new resource persons in mind, but the committee chair declined to name them for security reasons.

"The 'Garci' tape case can't be closed until they make these witnesses available to provide testimonies and present evidence, such as the Mayuga report," Biazon said, referring to the military fact-finding report on the scandal that the defense department had yet to submit to the Senate.

Ong had snubbed the committee hearings for fear that he would be arrested on sedition charges. Esperon, other generals, and Doble had invoked Ms Arroyo's order barring officials of the executive branch from testifying at congressional inquiries without clearance.

The absence of their testimonies has prevented the Senate committee from issuing a report on its long-running inquiry. The House had conducted its own inquiry, but issued an inconclusive report.

Cheating

Asked about his committee's findings so far, Biazon said: "There was cheating, and this was proved by statements and documents. And the beneficiary of cheating seems to be President Arroyo. These are all on record."

Biazon cited, for instance, Commission on Elections Commissioner Resurreccion Borra's statement that there was "massive cheating" in the previous polls, and official election records purportedly showing that results in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao had been rigged in Ms Arroyo's favor.

"These are all based on testimonies, documents and evidence," he said.

In the final tally, Ms Arroyo won by 1 million votes over her closest rival, the late actor Fernando Poe Jr.

National security aspect

Biazon's committee opened the inquiry late in 2005 to look into the national security aspect of the wiretapping scandal and allegations of electoral fraud.

The senator said the hearings would be resumed after all the legal and administrative obstacles to the appearance of witnesses had been cleared.

"At the right time and at the right condition, we will resume this. This thing is not yet closed," he said. "There is a right time and condition for everything."

In a statement, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada accused the DOJ of whitewash.

"The people should condemn this blatant disregard of the rule of law with the whitewash of the Garcillano case," said Estrada, a son of deposed President Joseph Estrada.

"The Arroyo's administration's disregard of the rule of law has become habitual," he said, adding that no matter how many times it did so, "its hands remain dirty in the eyes of the general public."

AFP chief edits out mention of Army use in polls in speech before GMA

ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF GEN. HERmogenes Esperon Jr. left some things unsaid when he faced President Macapagal-Arroyo and current and former military officials during the 71st AFP anniversary commemoration last Dec. 21.

He omitted from his speech his vow not to let the military be used again for partisan politics, according to a copy made available to the INQUIRER yesterday.

The copy indicated the paragraphs that Esperon decided to exclude, including: "Never again shall we allow the AFP to be manipulated or used as a pawn in the partisan game of politics. No more and never again during my incumbency."

That part of his speech was supposed to follow his statement emphasizing that he will not tolerate further military adventurism. But he also omitted that part.

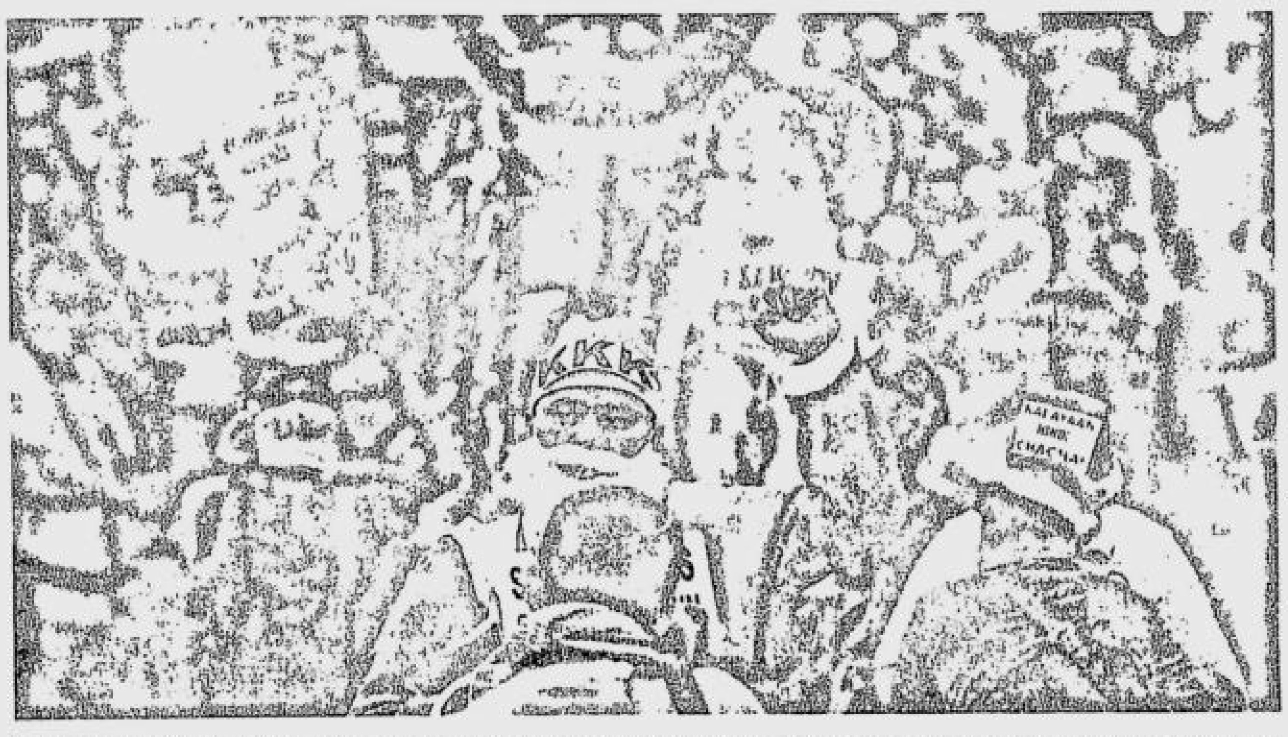
Last year, the military was implicated in alleged election cheating during the May 2004 presidential election after some generals, including Esperon, were mentioned in the so-called "Hello Garci" wiretaps.

The Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Isafp) allegedly wiretapped the conversations between former elections commissioner Virgilio Garcillano and the President and other officials.

But the military merely denied Isafp's involvement and no known investigation of the wiretapping was carried out.

A fact-finding team eventually cleared Esperon and virtually the entire military of allegations of cheating in the 2004 balloting for lack of evidence.

The "Hello Garci" scandal, however, created a serious challenge against the Arroyo administration and eventually led to the alleged attempted coup d'etat last February.



MEMBERS of the Partido ng Manggagawa dress up in Santa costumes during a rally on Ayala Avenue against Charter change. Malacañang described the Ayala rally as a flop.

RYAN LIM

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DECEMBER 20 (6PM), DECEMBER 24 & 26 (3PM)

TOYS AND COMICS COLLECTIBLES AUCTION
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MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED

Governors call emergency meeting on Cha-cha express

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr., *in Manila*
and Joey A. Gabieta, *Inquirer Visayas*

WITH PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO'S renewed pitch for Charter change (Cha-cha), governors nationwide have agreed to meet in the first week of January to firm up a common position, according to Ilocos Sur Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson.

In a phone interview, Singson, chair of the League of Provinces of the Philippines, said he and its president, Bohol Gov. Eric Aumentado, had agreed to hold an emergency meeting to assess the members' real sentiments on Cha-cha and add their voice to the ongoing debate on the issue.

Singson said the league would hold an open forum during the meeting to allow members to air their views on the President's determination to push for Cha-cha during their term in any of the three modes allowed under the Constitution—people's initiative, constituent assembly and consultative commission.

He said the governors would then vote on whether to push for Cha-cha and in what mode, based on the wishes of their constituents.

"We want to know the real sentiment of the people on this issue. I believe that the governors are in the best position to gauge the desires of their people. We want this issue to unite us rather than divide us," said Singson, who had earlier made public his aversion to amending the Constitution.

Despite recent setbacks

The league's plan to hold a meeting comes in the wake of moves by the administration to forge ahead with Cha-cha despite recent setbacks in both the Supreme Court and public opinion.

Earlier, Eastern Samar Gov. Ben Evardone said some local government officials were keen to file a second petition with the Commission of Elections for a people's initiative. (The first petition was rejected by the high court two months ago.)

The second crack at a people's initiative is reportedly being spearheaded by the President's party, Kampi, and its former chair, Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno.

Evardone and Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, a Kampi member, said they were optimistic that a fresh initiative would succeed this time because it would be kept simple and direct to the point, and would push for a unicameral Congress under a presidential leadership.

The two men were also encouraged by the high court's ruling that, despite rejecting the people's initiative petition of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines and Sigaw ng Bayan, upheld its earlier ruling on Republic Act 6735 (the Initiative and Referendum Act) as an enabling law.

Don't rush it

In Tacloban City, Leyte Rep. Remedios Petilla cautioned the proponents of the second petition for a people's initiative to observe the "proper processes."

Petilla, an administration ally, said that if the proponents of the planned second attempt at a signature campaign would do it in haste, "this will suffer the fate" of the first petition.

"While I am for [launching the second petition], proper processes must be carefully observed this time. And we should see to it that any attempt at gathering signatures must really come from the people themselves, and not local officials," Petilla told the INQUIRER.

"There must be stations in every barangay or designated areas where the people can go to sign the petition. In this way, doubts over the authenticity of the signatures and who are really wishing for the amendment of our Constitution would be erased," she said.

She also said any signature campaign must be "open and transparent."

Attendance sheets

Early this year, Cha-cha proponents gathered signatures during synchronized barangay assemblies nationwide.

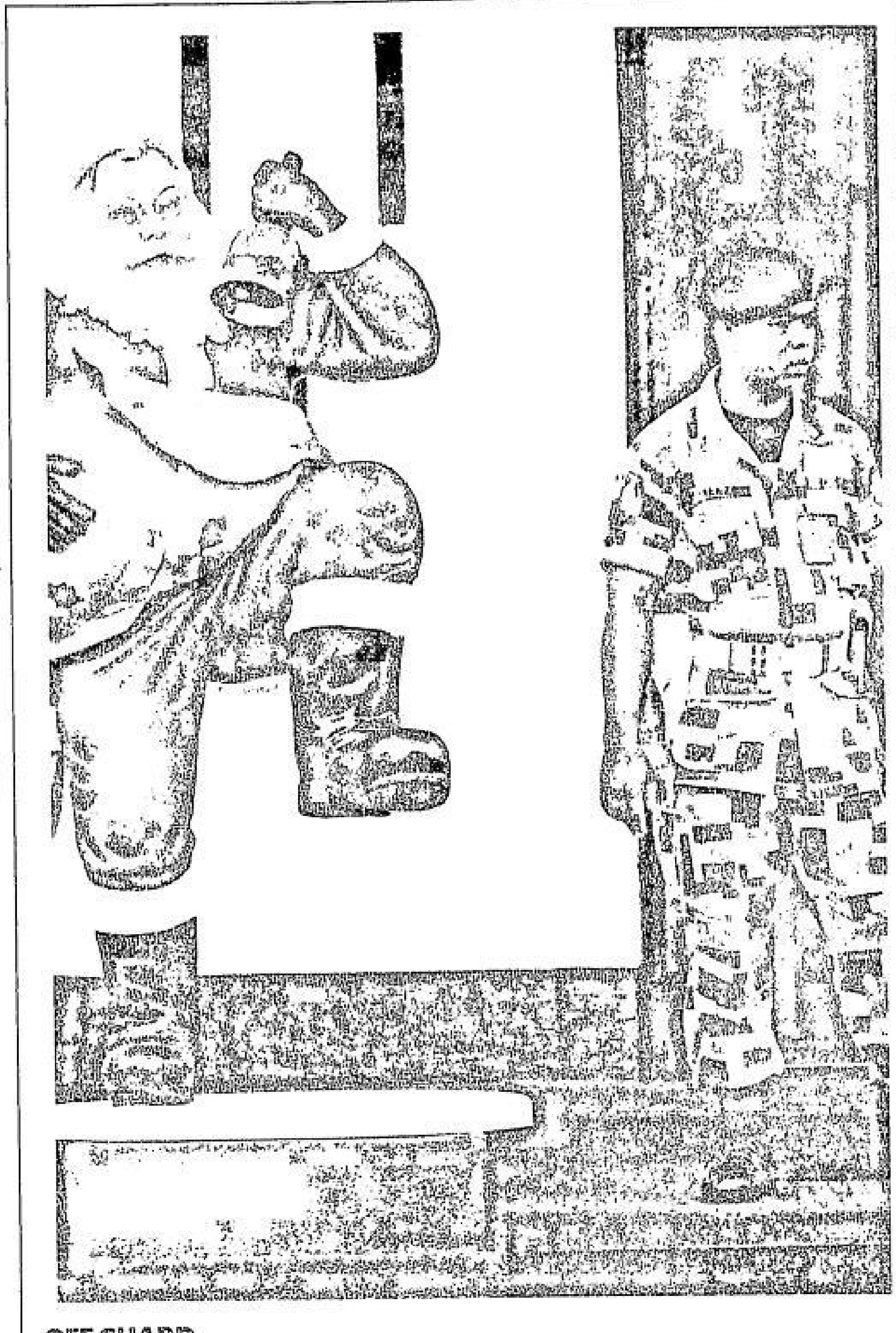
The signatures were on the "attendance sheets" of those who were present at the assemblies, but these were later used to support the campaign for a people's initiative.

The first attempt at a people's initiative also came under fire, with critics saying that it was not initiated by the people but by local officials loyal to the President.

Rep. Florencio Noel of the An Waray party-list group has also appealed to Interior Secretary Puno not to use local officials in a fresh attempt at gathering signatures.

Noel said this would not be a wise decision, and would result in another failed attempt.

"If we want this reported second attempt for a people's initiative to succeed, it should start from the people to make it legitimate. [It should show that] they, and not our local officials, are really the ones clamoring for Charter change," he said.



OFF GUARD
A member of the Presidential Security Group stands guard near the press conference hall in the PSG compound in Malacañang beside a laughing Santa Claus decor. LYN RILLON

Bomb-rigged motorcycle found near military camp

COTABATO CITY—Government security forces discovered a motorcycle rigged with explosives and set to blow up in Esperanza town in Sultan Kudarat on Saturday.

Lt. Col. Julieto Ando, Sixth Infantry Division spokesperson, said the motorcycle was found not far from a military checkpoint in Esperanza town. The motorcycle's fuel tank was converted into an explosive device using picric acid.

Ando confirmed that an undetermined amount of picric acid was placed inside the tank, while an alarm clock and a blasting cap were attached to it.

"It reportedly came from Sultan sa Barongis town and Liguasan Marsh (in Maguindanao). We are still determining the owner of the bike," Ando said.

Earlier, the military intercepted reports of bomb attacks in Mindanao, particularly in the cities of Koronadal, General Santos and Tacurong, during the Christmas holidays.

The bombing threats were intercepted after the military confirmed that Abu Sayyaf leader Khaddafy Janjalani has escaped a military dragnet in Sulu and has moved to Lanao del Sur.

Police in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao denied Janjalani's presence in the hinterlands of Lanao del Sur. *Jeoffrey Maitem, Inquirer Mindanao*

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Jobseekers warned of Internet scams

By Jerome Aning

WITH MORE FILIPINOS EXPECTED to seek work abroad next year, the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency yesterday warned the public against falling prey to job advertisements found in the Internet.

Hans Leo Cacdac, POEA deputy administrator for licensing and adjudication, said there was an increase in the number of applicants using the Internet to seek jobs who are being victimized by illegal recruiters and con artists.

The con artists, according to Cacdac, either build cheap-looking websites, advertise in legitimate online job search companies or enter several discussion boards or forums that are frequented by overseas Filipino workers to lure their victims.

As precautionary measures, the POEA issued the following pointers to overseas job applicants using the Internet.

- Read the entirety of the website. Examine whether the company name and profile appear to be believable. Check its company profile or the "About Us" page to see its office location and numbers.
- Examine the website design plus all links and pages available. A legitimate company would not mind spending for a website designed beautifully as the same serves as the business' window to the world.
- Take note of the website's invitations to send resumes and application papers through postal mail or drop boxes. Most legitimate websites would like you to fill up resume online or send them through mail.
- Take note of their offers. Most of them offer "too-good-to-be-true" salaries and other job perks including accommodation and bonuses.
- Check the domain name of the website to secure additional information.
- Report to the POEA or other law enforcement authorities any illegal recruitment activities conducted through the Internet.

Cacdac said the POEA does allow licensed recruitment agencies to advertise their job orders in their websites or any online job search engines if the vacancies are covered by manpower requests of accredited employers.

He said advertising for overseas employment is considered an act of recruitment that could only be done by entities lawfully authorized or licensed by POEA.

Gov't expects to attract 20-30M medical tourists

By Christian V. Esguerra

BEGINNING NEXT YEAR, THE Philippine Medical Tourism Program (PMTP) is expected to attract between 20 and 30 million foreign medical tourists, generating an income estimated at $2 billion within the next five years.

The projection came after PMTP officials had struck agreements with third-party agencies negotiating for the arrival of foreign patients in the country, according to Health Undersecretary Jade del Mundo, who is in charge of medical tourism.

Most of the patients will come from the United States and China with insufficient insurance coverage or none at all, he said.

"Since they will pull out of their own pockets, it's wise to go to the Philippines because our services here are much cheaper than those in their respective countries," he told the INQUIRER in an interview.

The coronary artery bypass graft procedure, for instance, costs only around P500,000 here, about half the price abroad, he noted.

Besides this procedure, many of the new medical tourists were expected to go for abdominal surgery and treatment for cancer, renal disease, and diabetes, the official said.

'Hopeless cases'

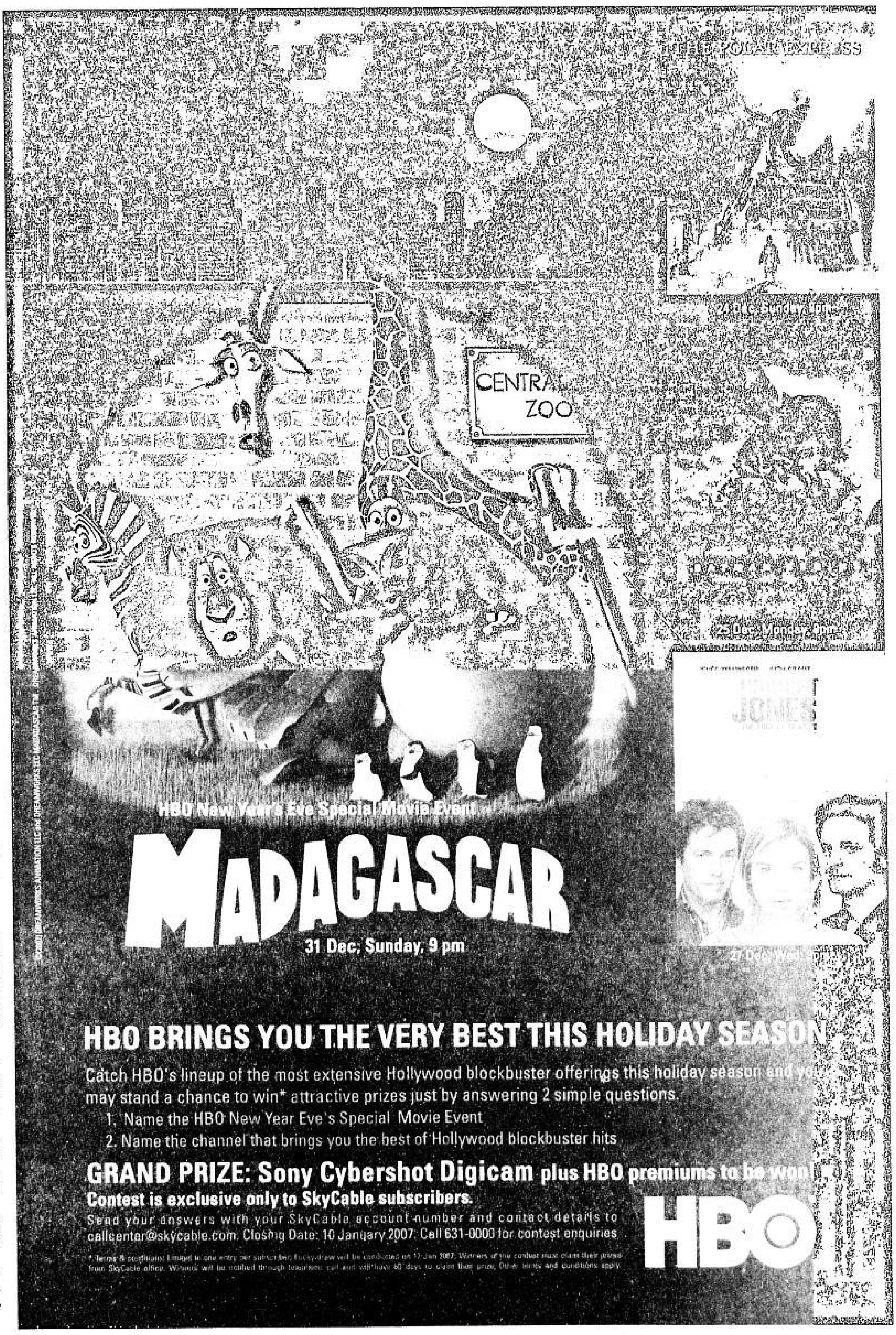
Quoting some of the third-party agents, Del Mundo said the influx of foreign patients would also include those with "hopeless cases." Some of them were expected to try alternative medicine, particularly "naturopathy," also dubbed "natural medicine."

"We are even expecting patients who need amputations," he said. "The agents have indicated that these patients want to try our different forms of alternative medicine."

Del Mundo said many of these patients were partly banking on successful "anecdotal" cases involving patients from Korea, Japan, China and Taiwan in the past.

"This is the reason why we are strengthening our alternative modalities," he said.

Consistently popular among foreign patients are cosmetic procedures such as blepharoplasty, nose and face lift, and liposuction.



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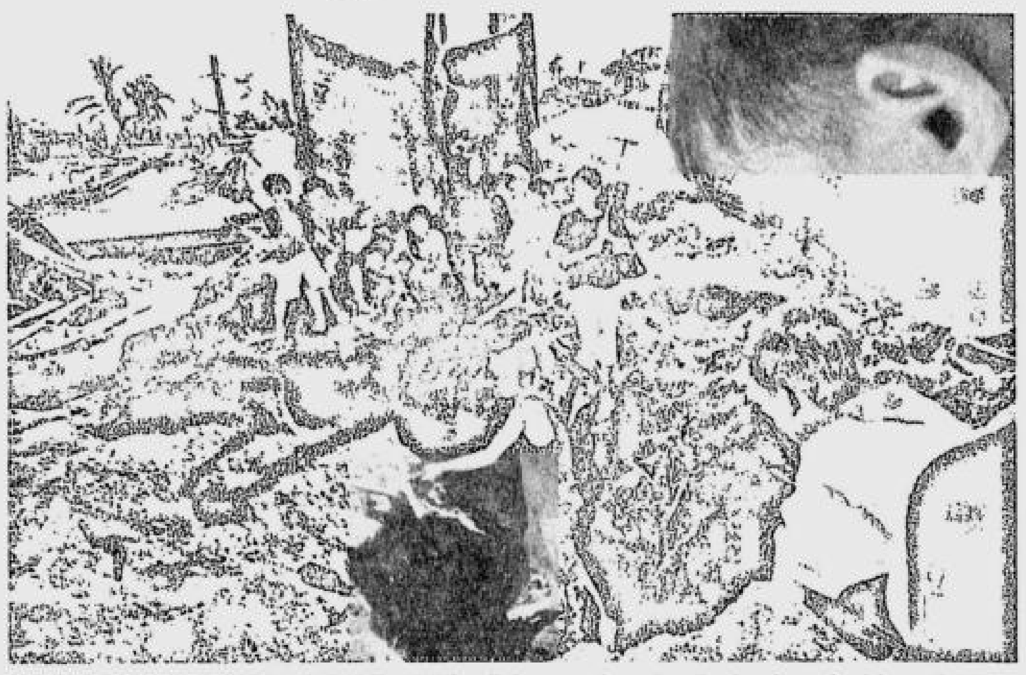
HBO

'This is Christmas enough ... we're alive'



SURVIVOR Evelyn Manjares (holding umbrella) supervises the digging for valuables at her house that was buried by volcanic debris in Binitayan village in Daraga, Albay. AFP

TYPHOON survivor Rudy Lacson and his children feast on a gift of apples. AFP

LEGAZPI CITY—EVELYN MANJARES SPENT Christmas digging through rubble that was once her home on the foothills of Mayon Volcano in Albay where typhoons and mudflow killed more than 1,200 people late last month.

The 47-year-old single mother of five clawed through the gray earth on Christmas Eve searching for a cabinet in which she had hidden P6,000.

"It's all I have in the world," Manjares told Agence France Presse. As the sun began to settle over Mayon she decided to call it a day and headed back to the evacuation center just a kilometer away from what was left of Binitayan village.

On Christmas Day, Manjares began the task all over again as she has done now for the past week trying to find her money and retrieve the few possessions she has left.

Manjares and her five children managed to survive the horror of Supertyphoon "Reming," which hit Bicol at the end of November creating avalanches of volcanic mud that killed more than 1,200 people and left a million homeless, their houses buried in the deluge.

Manjares joined other survivors for a Christmas Eve meal of spaghetti, rice or noodles. There were few presents for the children.

Spirit of Christmas

Even so, the Christmas spirit remained alive a few kilometers away in the village of Kilikao, where Rudy Lacson, 36, walked from the bus stop to his home.

As he strolled up the dusty road, surveying the destroyed homes of his friends, he was greeted by the wild, screams of six kids.

Lacson had just gotten off a bus from Manila where he works as a carpenter for P200 a day.

He was in the capital when Reming struck. But by word of mouth, he managed to learn that his family were safe.

His modest brick home had lost its roof. But as Lacson surveyed the damage, he smiled and said "it won't take long to put right."

His Christmas gift to his family was a bag of apples and a bag of spaghetti.

His wife, who runs a small local store, had just walked an hour from one of the relief centers that now dot the region, in order to get some rice.

Like many of the male adults in Bicol, Lacson works in Manila as there is very little for him in his hometown.

"I have been doing this for years," he told AFP. "I managed to send money back home each month which helps the family."

Still lucky

Looking around his small village, Lacson considers himself lucky. His house was built on high ground so it avoided the raging torrent that the river had become during the typhoon.

"We lost the roof but that can be fixed and the kids are OK. That's what's important," he added.

Lacson planned to spend Christmas with his family. His wife prepared the family meal of spaghetti and some rice.

There were no other presents for his kids, and there were no decorations in his village.

Even so, Lacson said: "This is Christmas enough ... I have my family and we are alive." *AFP*

Candle procession for typhoon victims in Albay village

From page A1

around their tent.

"Last night, I could not sleep. I could only think of how sad our Christmas was," Semanas recalled.

Instead of celebrating with a traditional Christmas party where food was made freely available to neighbors, Semanas and his family had to make do with some bacon and a loaf of bread donated by local residents.

Shameful to beg

"It is shameful that we have to beg for aid on this Christmas Day," he said mournfully.

Ariel Llaguno, 45, was working as an engineer in Qatar when he received a telephone call from his family in Busay during the mudslide.

A son called to him, saying "Daddy, the flood is here. What do we do?"

Llaguno told the family by telephone to open the doors so the floodwaters could rush through the house without knocking it down.

He remembered his wife saying, "I will handle things here. Just be careful over there."

That was the last he heard from her.

Like a cardboard box

Neighbors told Llaguno that they saw the concrete house being carried away like a cardboard box by the mudslide with the terrified faces of Llaguno's wife and four children, visible in the windows. His brother, a sister and other relatives also died that night.

"I am not an evil person like Hitler. Why did this happen to me? It is like a nightmare. Everything I worked for, for 15 years, has all been wiped out, along with my family," Llaguno said as he looked at pictures of his family in their now-vanished house.

"If I had only one dead, I would be crying but with so many dead, I cannot cry anymore," he said.

The traditional Christmas Eve Mass at the Busay evacuation center was more like a funeral. At the end of the services, the survivors of Busay formed a procession, carrying candles as they walked to their former homes.

The only sign of their once-thriving village were the roofs of houses, still sticking out from the mud along with pieces of clothing still strewn about.

Unity amid hardship

In his Christmas sermon, Fr. Romeo Cerojanes called for unity amid hardship. "Let us always help each other and share the burden during this time of crisis," he remarked.

For Christmas, the 1,500 people at the evacuation center received some boxes of ham, donated by a charitable individual.

Rotary International and the British charity Shelterbox have also provided tents for the refugees who had been huddling in overcrowded classrooms.

Shelterbox volunteer, Mark Smith, a British police officer, continued to provide relief to the evacuees. "We're lucky to be here this Christmas, to help people and give service." *AFP*

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Reming victims refuse to have sad Christmas

By Ephraim Aguilar
Inquirer
Southern Luzon

THE RELIEF and Emergency Response Operations Missions (RERO) of Operation Compassion International Inc. distributed teddy bears to children in Legazpi City and in Daraga, Albay as part of its "Thousand Bears for Bicol" campaign to ease their grief over the loss of loved ones and shelters during Supertyphoon "Reming."

JOANNA LOS BAÑOS/INQUIRER SOUTHERN LUZON

LEGAZPI CITY—They've lost their homes but they refuse to have a blue Christmas.

The 145 families displaced by Supertyphoon "Reming" and who are temporarily housed at the Bitano Elementary School in this city have found a way to celebrate Christmas.

As early as 3 p.m. on Saturday, a group of housewives talked and laughed while they shredded stalks of *malunggay* or horseradish they had planned to cook in *gata* or coconut cream.

"*Wala kaming pambili ng lechon, kaya ito na lang* (We don't have money to buy roast pig, so we're serving this). What matters is that we are all together," said Lea Agripa, an evacuee and one of the camp leaders in the shelter.

Cleofo Moyo, another camp leader said the families shared whatever they had for the simple celebration, like Bicol Express (a pork dish cooked with *siling labuyo* (chili peppers) and coconut milk) and other homemade delicacies.

Each family from Barangay Bitano also cooked one kilo of rice and donated a portion of their rationed relief goods which would be put together in a raffle during the party.

"We also want to feel the spirit of Christmas despite the things we've lost," said Moyo.

Since electricity had been restored at the shelter on Friday, Agripa decided to borrow a sound system.

"We plan to have parlor games for the children, sporting events for the teenagers and a lot of singing and dancing," she said.

In one corner, a group of teens was playing volleyball while another group was singing Christmas carols.

The adults prepared food while grandmothers told stories of Christmas past.

Closer

Agripa said she couldn't recall of any time when their community gathered together like this.

"Some of us here didn't know each other until we were forced to live together in the evacuation center. Most of our homes were destroyed by the typhoon," she said.

For almost three weeks now, each room at the shelter housed 18 to 27 families. Because of the physical closeness, they started to treat one another like family, she added.

At the height of Reming, Agripa and her son scrambled out of their house minutes before it was carried off by rushing floodwaters.

"I didn't want to leave our house and our belongings but my son kept telling me we should leave. He is my angel. If I had not listened to him we could have been trapped inside," she said.

Agripa and her son had to wade through the floodwaters to a nearby public dome, where the rest of the villagers had sought refuge.

Her son sustained deep wounds from galvanized iron sheets floating in the floodwaters.

Agripa recounted that other residents who waited till the last minute to leave their homes also had to swim to safety.

Picking up the pieces

"After the disaster I was sad because only the flooring of our house was left. It was only when my neighbors started to chide me: '*Bakit ikaw lang ba? Lahat tayo wala nang bahay* (You're not the only one. We are all homeless),' that I felt I was not alone," she said.

Relief goods abound in villages affected by lahar, according to Moyo, but the government has yet to bring housing materials.

"The government gave food items to families with totally damaged houses. But what we need most are materials to rebuild our homes," she said.

With the resumption of classes on Jan. 3, the evacuees will have to leave the shelter. They have nowhere to go.

Dark Christmas

"We need tents. We even cleaned up an abandoned building which does not have a roof just in case there's nowhere else we can stay," said Moyo.

Esperanza Bantigui said her family gathered scrap materials and constructed a makeshift roof over their heads.

"*Basta may masurukan sana* (Just so we would have a space for shelter)," the 71-year-old woman said.

And since full power had yet to be restored, 83 percent of the villages in Albay had a dark Christmas Eve—literally.

Alex Realoza, general manager of the Albay Electric Cooperative, said they were only able to restore power in the downtown areas.

Residents, however, found comfort in this forwarded Christmas text message: "Even if this city is bathed in darkness, there is no reason not to celebrate Christmas, whose meaning lies not in material things."

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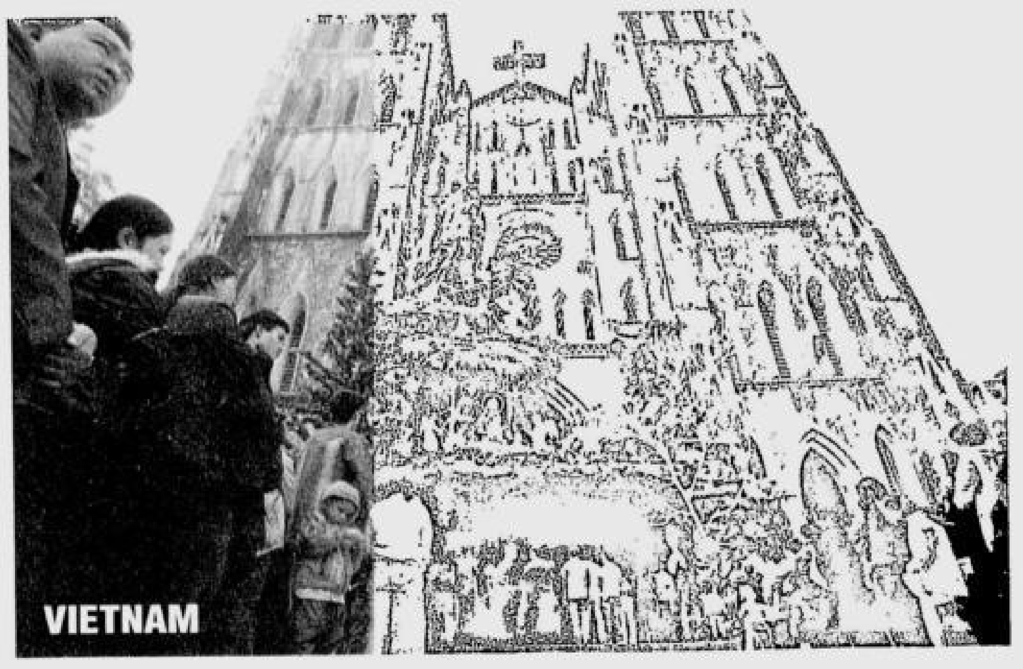
CATHOLICS attend Christmas Mass outside Hanoi's cathedral. Christmas was celebrated throughout Buddhist Vietnam at churches by some seven million Catholics across the country. AFP



YOUNG Christian Karen sing and pray at their jungle camp in Karen state near the Thai-Burmese border. AP

Asian Christians pack churches

JAKARTA—INDONESIA'S CHRISTIANS defied terror warnings and flocked to church in the mostly Muslim country on Christmas Day, while Australians threatened by wildfires received a longed-for gift—rain, and lots of it.

Asian Christians, a minority in most nations in the region, celebrated the birth of Jesus with services and family feasts. In the Philippines, Asia's only predominantly Christian nation, a flurry of mobile phone text greetings swamped networks as midnight approached.

In mostly Buddhist Japan and Thailand, shoppers packed malls awash with tinsel, Christmas trees and special promotions, reflecting the ever-growing commercialization of the season worldwide.

In continuing separatist violence in Sri Lanka, suspected Tamil Tiger rebels hurdled a grenade at a police post near a church in the northwest, killing a policeman and wounding three others, the government said. In southern Thailand, Muslim insurgents shot and killed a soldier and a civilian.

Under heavy guard

Tens of thousands of police guarded churches in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation though also home to a significant Christian minority. Six years ago, Muslim extremists bombed churches across the nation as they held Christmas services, killing 19 people.

The United States and Australia warned more attacks were possible this year. The advisories were not based on specific intelligence, but reflect a general belief that extremists are more likely to strike over the holiday season.

"Life and death are in the hands of God," said Lolita Utamisari after attending Mass at Jakarta's main cathedral. "We could die anytime, anywhere. Therefore, there is no need to be scared."

Chinese, Indian and European Christians also worshipped in mostly Muslim Malaysia, while others shopped, clogging roads to Megamall, Asia's largest shopping mall, in the capital Kuala Lumpur.

Summer rains

Residents in Australia's drought-affected southeast danced in the streets as summer rains drenched wildfires that have burned out of control for the past three weeks.

"It rained all last night and this morning," said Kirrily Pay, a hotel manager in Woods Point, Victoria, which has been under threat from the fires. "We had the biggest party, we were absolutely ecstatic, we can't believe we're still here."

Around 800 volunteer firefighters were sent home for Christmas after the rains drenched the fires, which razed more than 8,700 square kilometers of forest and farmland, destroying 32 houses and resulting in the death of a firefighter who fell off a trailer while battling the blaze.

Chinese Christmas was celebrated with midnight Mass at churches in Beijing and Shanghai.

The English-language China Daily on Monday had a front-page photo of the Mass in Shanghai, but the top news in the Chinese-language media was the funeral of a popular comedian who died on Wednesday.

The top story in the People's Daily, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, was about increased agricultural output.

Imported holidays

But the China Daily also ran several comments in response to a recent public call from a group of graduate students that the Chinese should resist imported holidays, such as Christmas.

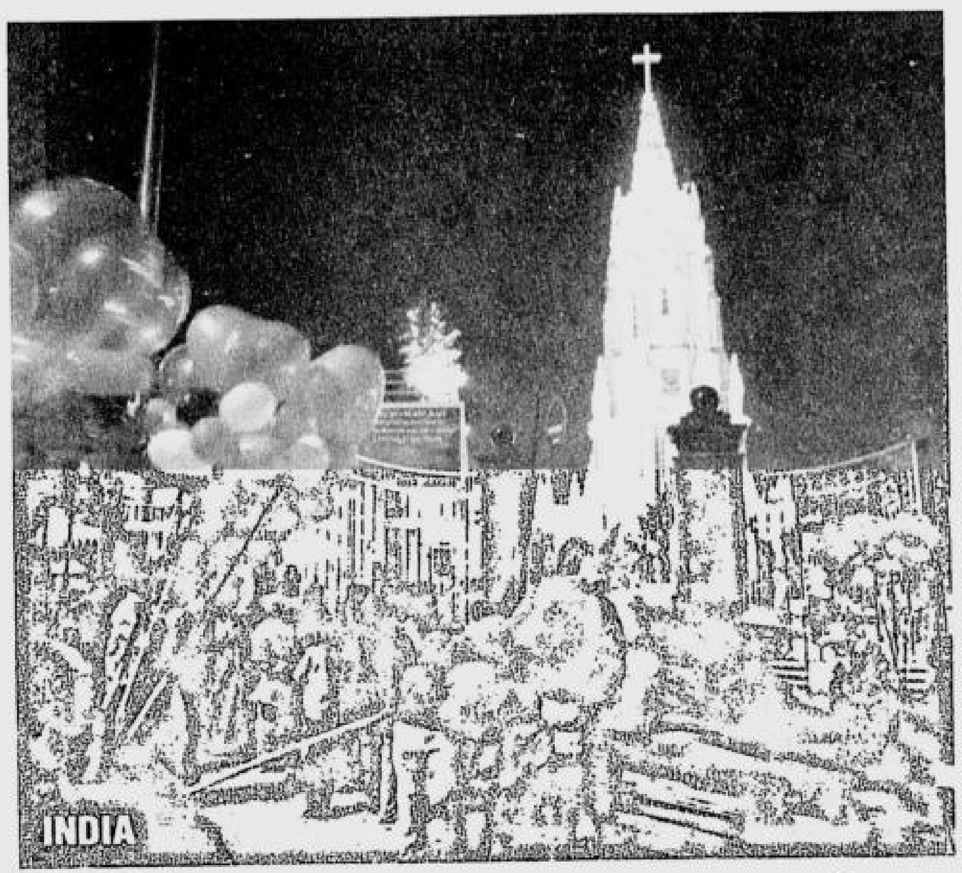
The comments said tolerance should be shown. "Our national culture will not fade only because people are celebrating foreign holidays," said a comment from the Changjiang Times.

Deep in the jungles of Burma (Myanmar), the country's ethnic Karen minority celebrated Christmas with prayers and carols in villages and makeshift camps that have been wracked by violence in recent months, witnesses said.

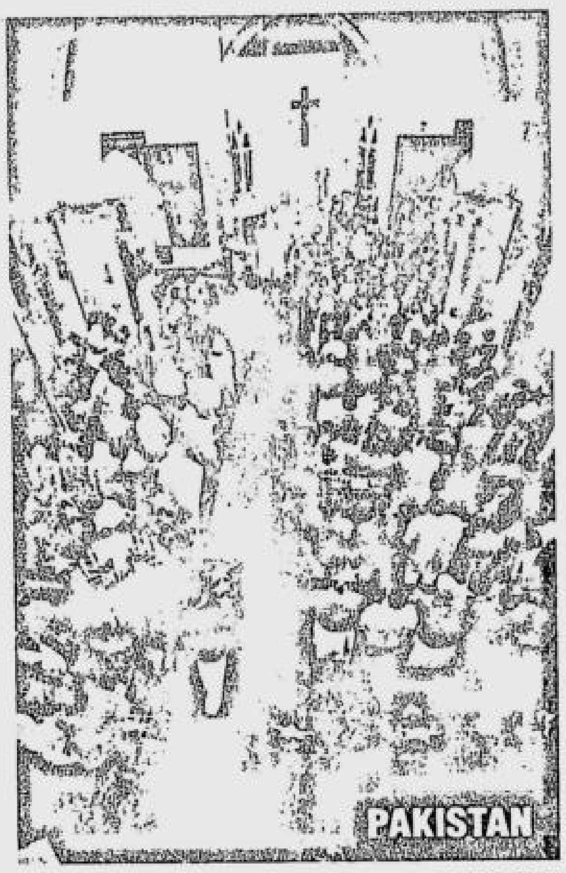
A year-long government offensive by the military junta has forced more than 25,000 to flee and killed dozens, rights groups say.

In Thailand, Christmas was about shopping, sunbathing and relaxing.

The beaches and bars in Phuket—a resort still recovering from the 2004 Asian tsunami—were packed with tourists. Waitresses on Patong beach got into the spirit, dressing up as elves to hand out drink tickets. *AP*



VENDORS sell balloons during the Christmas midnight Mass at the St. Mary's Basilica in Bangalore, India. Though Hindus and Muslims comprise majority of the population in India, Christmas is celebrated with much fanfare. AP



PAKISTANI Christians celebrate the Christmas midnight Mass at a church in Lahore in Pakistan. The nation of 145 million people has a minority of around 4 million Christians who celebrate Christmas. AFP

WORSHIPPERS hold candles during Christmas Eve Mass at a church in Surabaya, East Java, in Indonesia. Police searched churchgoers and swept for bombs amid Western nations' warnings of terrorist attacks. AP

200 OFWs dispel gloom in Bethlehem

From page A1

dents enacted Christmas rituals that seem out of place in the Middle East. Palestinian Scouts marched through the streets, some wearing kilts and pompom-topped berets, playing drums and bagpipes. They passed inflatable red-suited Santas, looking forlorn in the West Bank sunshine.

Israeli barrier

Other scenes of this Bethlehem Christmas, however, could be found nowhere else. To get to town, Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, the Roman Catholic Church's highest official in the Holy Land, rode in his motorcade through a huge steel gate in the Israeli separation barrier that separates Jerusalem from Bethlehem.

Israel says it built the barrier to prevent Palestinian suicide bombers from reaching Israeli population centers. Palestinians view the structure, which dips into parts of the West Bank, as a land grab.

The robed clergyman was led into Palestinian-controlled territory by a formal escort of five Israeli policemen mounted on horses. Two Israeli border policemen closed the gate behind him.

Sabbah, wearing a flowing gold and burgundy robe, led a procession into St. Catherine's Church, adjacent to the Church of the Nativity, the traditional birthplace of Jesus, for midnight Mass.

Hundreds of worshippers packed the cavernous hall for the service, as clergymen chanted in Latin amid the sound of bells and organ music. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas attended the ceremony, escorted by a large security detail to a front row seat.

In his homily, Sabbah offered a blessing to Abbas, appealed to Palestinians to halt their recent "fratricidal struggles" and called for an end to Israeli-Palestinian bloodshed.

Time for new measures

"The conflict here has lasted too long," Sabbah said.

"It is high time that the leaders who have our destinies in their hands in this land—specifically, the Palestinian and Israeli leaders as well as those of the international community—it is time for all of them to take new measures that will bring an end to the long phase of death in our history and lead us into a new phase in the history of this Holy Land."

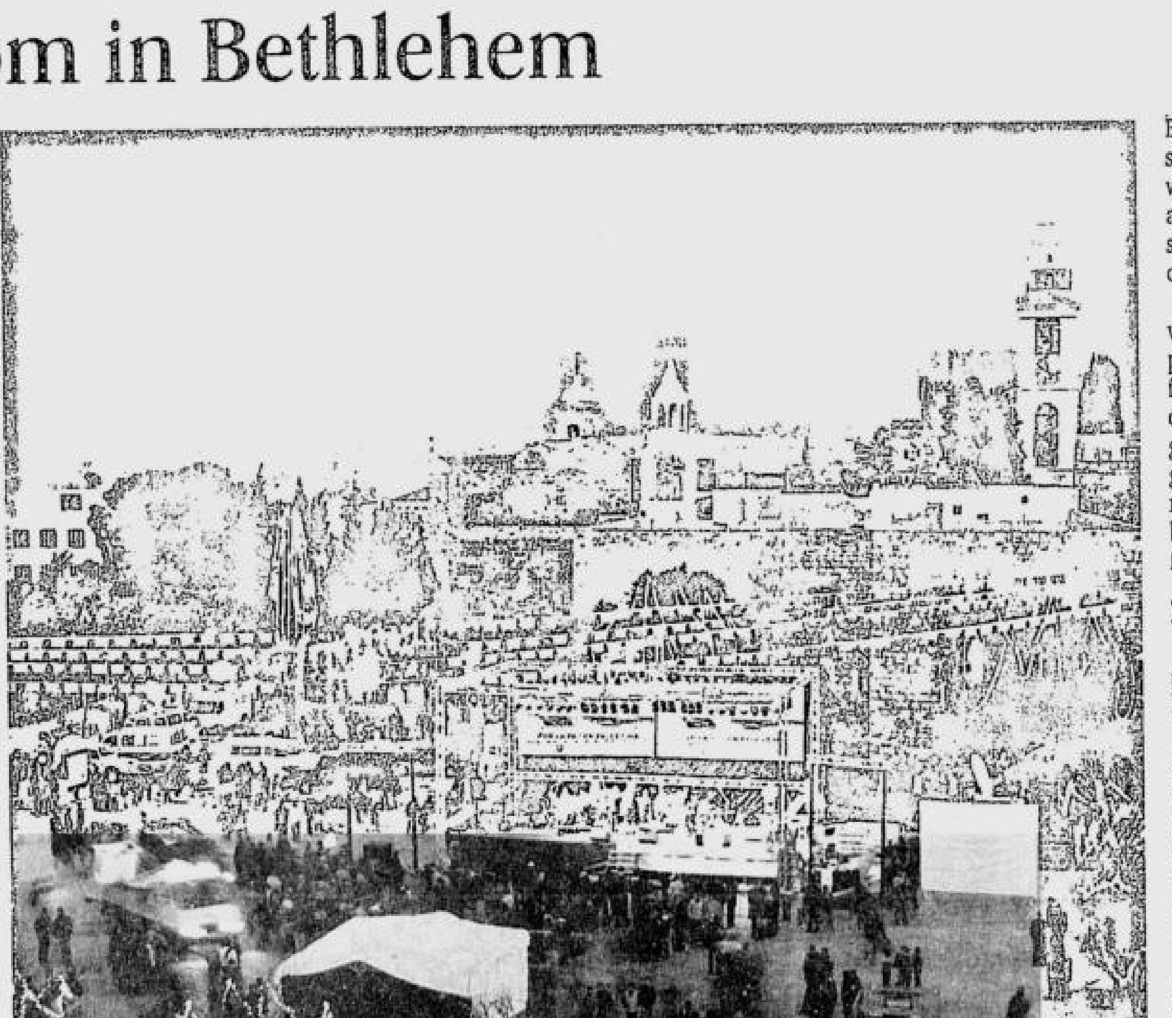
Sabbah asked all political leaders and adversaries, including Israeli troops and those "who are classified as extremists and terrorists" to "examine their conscience" to end the bloodshed.

Earlier, Abbas expressed hope that his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on Saturday would lead to a peace breakthrough. He called the meeting "a good start."

"I congratulate our people, especially our Christian brothers, not only here but all around the world for Christmas and the New Year, God bless us," said Abbas, who is Muslim.

Bethlehem's tourist industry has been hit hard by the last six years of Israeli-Palestinian violence and by the barrier, which Israel began building in 2002, but also by internal Palestinian friction.

This Christmas is the first under a Palestinian Authority governed by the militant Islamic group Hamas. To alleviate Christian fears ahead of the holiday, Hamas promised that it would send $50,000 (euro38,000) to decorate Manger Square in the center of town for the holiday. It was not clear if the money ever arrived.



MANGER Square with the Church of the Nativity in the background during Christmas Eve in Bethlehem. AP

'Worst Christmas'

Manger Square and the surrounding buildings were decorated in bright neon lights. Bands performed on a stage, and a large screen beamed images of Palestinian flags and officials. But few foreign tourists appeared to be among the crowd.

"It's a lot more positive than I thought," said one of the foreigners, Frank Baumann, 59, of Squamish, Canada, who came with his wife and three daughters. "It's very festive and everybody is in a good mood. There's certainly no sense of any violence."

Standing outside his empty souvenir shop, George Baboul said this was the "worst Christmas" he has seen in more than 30 years. Baboul's shop, the "Bethlehem Star Store," is in a prime location, at the side of the Church of the Nativity, but he said there was no business.

"No tourists are coming," said Baboul, 72, who opened the shop in 1967. "I don't know what's the reason for that. There are no problems, Bethlehem is safe, but tourists are afraid to come."

By evening, Manger Square was bustling with thousands of people. The small contingent of foreign tourists included a Polish choir group and a handful of pilgrims from South Korea who gathered to sing carols in one corner of the square, interrupted briefly by the loud call to prayer from a nearby mosque.

200 Filipinos

"It's exciting. I can feel that Jesus was here," said Jae Hwan-kim, 29, of Seoul.

Israel's tourism ministry forecast 18,000 tourists would visit Bethlehem this year, up from 16,000 last year, but far below the tens of thousands of people who thronged Manger Square at the height of peacemaking in the 1990s.

With every Christmas, the Holy Land's Christian community shrinks a bit. The native Palestinian Christian population has dipped below 2 percent of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Arab East Jerusalem, down from at least 15 percent in 1950, by some estimates. Bethlehem is now less than 20 percent Christian.

In Gaza, where 3,000 Christians live among around 1.4 million Muslims, the head of the tiny Roman Catholic community, Fr. Manuel Musallem, canceled the midnight Mass celebration, citing recent Palestinian infighting between Fatah and Hamas.

"The children told me Santa Claus won't come this year because it's too dangerous," he said. *AP*

Pope issues Christmas call to protect children

VATICAN CITY—POPE BENEDICT XVI ushered in Christmas at a midnight Mass on Sunday, saying the image of the baby Jesus in a manger should remind everyone of the plight of poor, abused and neglected children the world over.

The 79-year-old Benedict, marking the second Christmas season of his pontificate, celebrated the Mass for more than 10,000 people in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Thousands of others watched on large screens outside on a clear, starry night and millions more tuned in via television or radio round the world.

"The child of Bethlehem directs our gaze toward all children, particularly those who suffer and are abused in the world, the born and the unborn," the Pope said in his homily, making a reference to abortion.

"Toward children who are placed as soldiers in a violent world; toward children who have to beg; toward children who suffer deprivation and hunger; toward children who are unloved. In all of these it is the Child of Bethlehem who is crying out to us. It is the God who has become small who appeals to us."

Just as the shepherds of Bethlehem were called by an angel to seek the child lying in the manger, modern man was called to listen to the message of the baby Jesus, the Pope said.

Scandal

"Let us pray this night that the brightness of God's love may enfold all these children. Let us ask God to help us do our part so that the dignity of children may be respected. May they all experience the light of love, which mankind needs so much more than the material necessities of life," he said.

The Catholic Church, particularly in the United States, is still reeling from a 2002 child sexual abuse scandal involving priests. This month, a papal preacher suggested the Pope should call a day of penitence to seek forgiveness from God.

At the start of the solemn Mass, a cantor sang the Kalenda, an ancient text that presents Christ as the center of the cosmos and of all history.

The Pope, wearing resplendent gold and white vestments, again spoke out against the materialism that he has said several times has been allowed to dominate Christmas.

"During the festive meals of these days let us remember the Lord's words: 'When you give a dinner or a banquet do not invite those who will invite you in return, but invite those whom no one invites and who are not able to invite you'," he said.

"This also means when you give gifts for Christmas, do not give only to those who will give to you in return but give to those who receive from no one and who cannot give you anything back."

A member of the congregation read a prayer in Arabic asking God to encourage "a spirit of dialogue, mutual understanding and collaboration" among followers of the three great monotheistic religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

On Christmas Day, the Pope is scheduled to deliver his traditional, twice-yearly "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) message and blessing to crowds in St. Peter's Square.

Shutting Christ out

At his traditional Sunday address from the window of his apartments, he urged the world not to shut Christ out of Christmas and to banish prejudices hindering peace.

"May his birth not find us busy celebrating Christmas forgetting that he (Jesus) is the very person at the center of the feast," the Pope told thousands of pilgrims and tourists.

He urged that the many people who would spend Christmas "in solitude, in sickness and in suffering" should be remembered.

The real spirit of Christmas was a commitment to "overcome prejudices, break down barriers and eliminate situations that pitted individuals and people against each other in order to build a world of justice and peace together," the Pope said. *Reuters*

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Pope: World needs savior ...

From page A1

who, bereft of hope, are forced to leave their homes and countries in order to find humane living conditions elsewhere?"

Progress has not altered the need for a savior, Benedict said.

"Despite humanity's many advances, man has always been the same: A freedom poised between good and evil, between life and death. It is there, in the very depths of his being, ... that man always needs to be 'saved.'"

Solution to conflicts

Benedict also urged a solution to conflicts across the world, especially in the Middle East and Africa, in his Christmas Day address that included an appeal for the poor, the exploited and all those who suffer.

"With deep apprehension I think, on this festive day, of the Middle East, marked by so many grave crises and conflicts, and I express my hope that the way will be opened to a just and lasting peace," he said.

"I place in the hands of the divine Child of Bethlehem the indications of a resumption of dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which we have witnessed in recent days, and the hope of further encouraging developments," the Pontiff added.

Hopes for new peace talks after years of violence and a diplomatic standstill were raised with a summit on Saturday between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas, during which Olmert promised "immediate and concrete steps" to ease the humanitarian conditions of Palestinians.

Benedict made an equally strong appeal for "an end to the brutal violence" in Iraq.

"I appeal to all those who hold in their hands the fate of Iraq, that there will be an end to the brutal violence that has brought so much bloodshed to the country, and that every one of its inhabitants will be safe to lead a normal life," he said.

The Pope also spoke of his hope that "a democratic Lebanon, open to others and in dialogue with different cultures and religions, will survive and progress."

He said he prayed for peace in Sri Lanka, and "that in (the western Sudanese region of) Darfur and throughout Africa there will be an end to fratricidal conflicts."

He also called for an end to violence in whole of Africa, as Ethiopian fighter jets bombed airports in Somalia.

Welby case

In his address, the Pope also made a reference to the controversial case of Piergiorgio Welby, a paralyzed Italian man who was denied a Catholic service because he had asked to die.

"What are we to think of those who choose death in the belief that they are celebrating life?" he said.

Welby, an advocate of euthanasia, died on Wednesday after a doctor gave him sedatives and detached a respirator that had kept the victim of advanced muscular dystrophy alive for years.

Under his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, the Christmas Day message became an occasion to review progress and setbacks for humanity. *Reports from AFP, AP and Reuters*

Art of the re-gift gains acceptance

From page A1

through some re-gifting machine, or try to lift my fingerprints off it, how are they going to know it's a re-gift?" Champagne said in an interview while doing her Christmas shopping at the Manhattan Mall.

"They even live in another state. Besides, the candles had been under my bed for so long, it's like they are looking for a perfect home."

Champagne said she saw nothing wrong with giving unwanted presents to others as gifts.

A survey conducted earlier this year by Harris Interactive and Tassimo Hot Beverage System showed she is far from alone.

The survey's results, which were released in October, showed that 78 percent of the more than 1,500 consumers polled think it's acceptable to re-gift some, or most, of the time. *Reuters*

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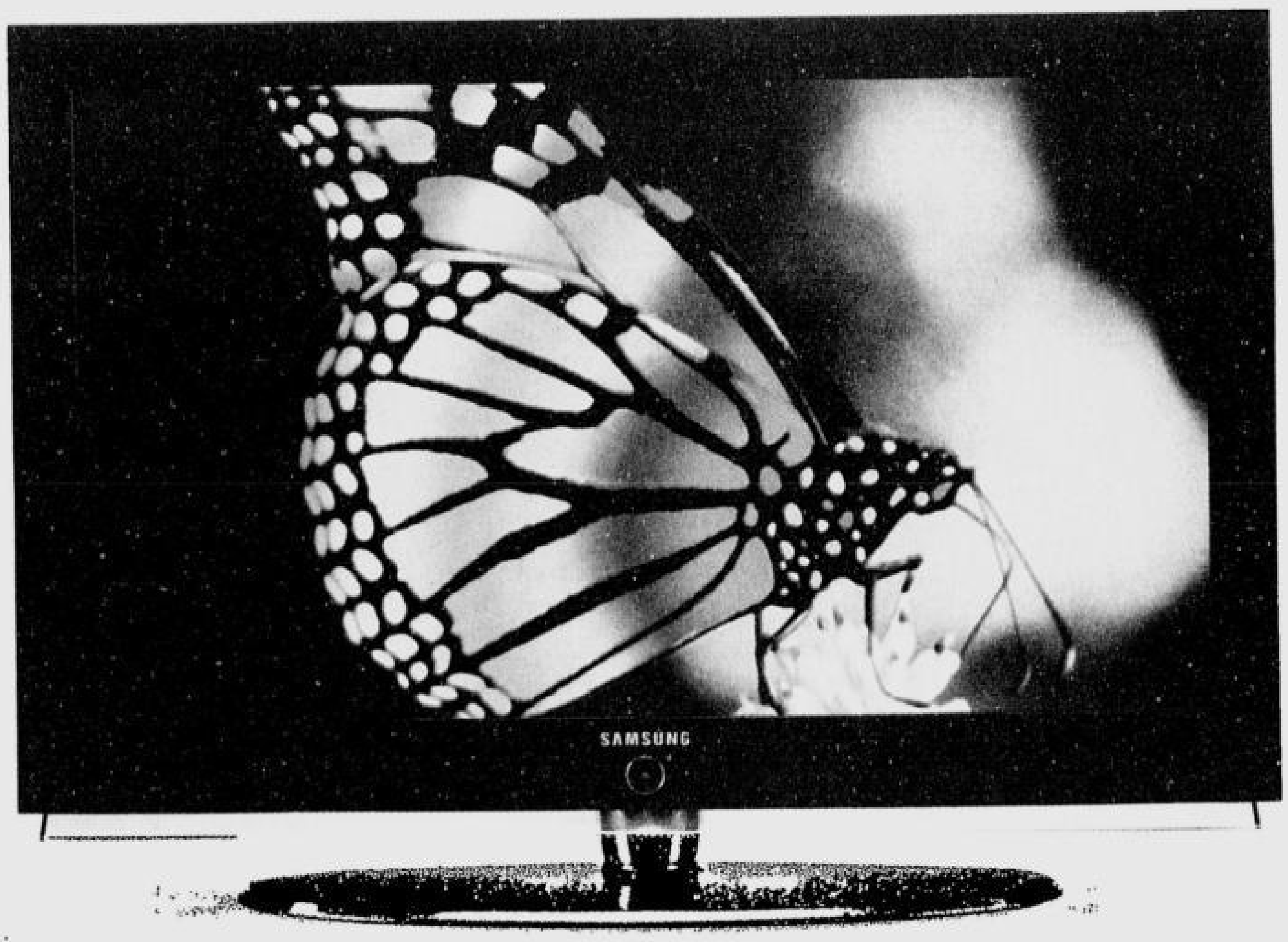

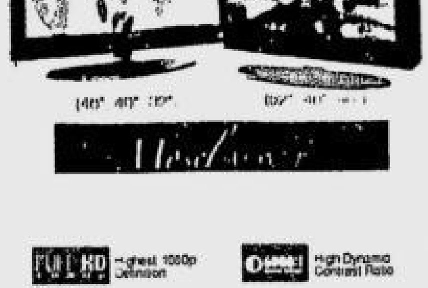

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A different Christmas for 'Nicole,' Smith

From page A1

as the delights of the sweet-toothed, fruit cocktail float, *buco* salad, *leche flan* and ice cream.

But she could not help thinking of what lay ahead.

"It's like I can now heave a sigh of relief but, at the same time, I can't, because there are still issues," she said, referring to the continuing dispute over whether Smith should stay at the Makati City Jail (MCJ) or be returned to US custody while the appeals process is ongoing.

Legal dispute

Since Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon convicted him of raping Nicole and ordered his confinement at the MCJ on Dec. 4, Smith has been fighting to be returned to US custody on the basis of the legal protection stipulated in the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).

The legal dispute was elevated to the Court of Appeals when Pozon rejected Smith's plea to be returned to the US Embassy, where he and his three coaccused (since acquitted) stayed for the duration of the trial.

Until the appellate court rules on his petition, Smith will spend his days and nights as the only convict at the MCJ, a holding facility for crime suspects still facing trial.

Jail officials and their legal consultants are working on a motion requesting the court that Smith be remanded to the Bureau of Corrections, the rightful custodian of convicts, or a facility agreed upon by US and Philippine authorities, as stipulated in the VFA.

"He just had his usual dinner from the [US] Embassy ... The only thing that was special was ham," said Joan de Venecia, one of Smith's lawyers, when asked how the soldier spent Christmas.

On Christmas Eve, De Venecia said, Smith stayed in his separate room as other inmates shared *noche buena* with visiting loved ones.

"But I saw lots of goodies, like cookies, and there were lots of gifts from his supporters—letters, food, books, clothes—that were handed to [jail guards] and brought to his room," she said.

E-mail of thanks

Yesterday, Grace Santos, leader of the group "Supporters of Daniel Smith," forwarded to reporters a purported e-mail from the soldier's parents.

The letter, said to have been written by Jim and Donna Smith, read in part:

"We are Dan's parents and we both want to take the opportunity to tell you all how much it means to us and our family to know that there are people out there that are supporting Dan. As you can imagine, this is an incredibly difficult time for us all.

"We have spoken to Dan, and all of the cards, letters and prayers mean more to him than you can ever imagine. It is so hard for us to think about him spending Christmas in that jail, but just to know that there are people there who are thinking about him and bringing him goodies makes it just a little bit easier. Words can never express how much we appreciate your efforts to spend time with Dan and show him support."

While she could only guess that Smith's Missouri-based parents got the group's e-mail address from US Embassy staff, Santos said she was certain that the letter had come from them.

She said a cousin, a computer expert who traced the source of the e-mail, confirmed that it was indeed from Missouri.

David and Goliath

But if Smith's parents are giving thanks, Nicole's mother is upset.

Reached by phone yesterday, the mother lashed out at the Philippine government's executive branch for concurring in the US claim of custody over Smith.

"I am really angry ... I just wish the fight would be fair, but now [President Macapagal-Arroyo] is intervening ... I just hope that somehow, she would defend the Filipino," the mother said in Filipino.

Added the longtime civilian employee of the Philippine Navy: "Our fight is like that of David and Goliath. We never got any help from the government throughout this fight; we never asked anybody for help. It was my family that worked for [Smith's conviction]. And that VFA? It's only [the government] that benefits from it."

Nicole, her family and legal team have been opposed to continuing US custody of Smith.

But the Philippines' justice and foreign affairs departments, as well as Malacañang, have been asserting the right of US authorities to custody, in compliance with the country's obligations under the VFA.

P2.3 million

While Nicole has achieved partial victory with Smith's conviction, her mother laments that the family still has to go through another struggle.

"I spent millions and this will happen? This is unfair ... We spent our own money for this case then he (Smith) will not be jailed? Now our enemy is our own government, not just the Americans," the mother said.

She said she spent around P2.3 million throughout the yearlong trial—for expenses in transporting herself and Nicole's siblings to Manila from their native Zamboanga and back, Nicole's household expenses in the Metro Manila house where she has been staying, food expenses, and the duplication of pleadings and court transcripts, among others.

"I have spent my savings from my 25 years of service with the human resources department [of the Philippine Navy]. I have several loans I have yet to pay for. I have sold property. My daughter working in Italy could not even call me on Christmas Day because all she has earned in the past month she sent me for our expenses during the trial," the mother said.

"Now, my children have nothing special this Christmas ... We used to have grand Christmas celebrations, but now we can't," she said, adding that all her family had left was the canteen at the Zamboanga military base frequented by both Filipino and US servicemen.

Unpaid damages

The mother also said the P100,000 in damages that the court had awarded Nicole was still unpaid as Smith was bent on appealing his conviction.

At any rate, she said, it could not compensate for her family's financial and emotional trauma.

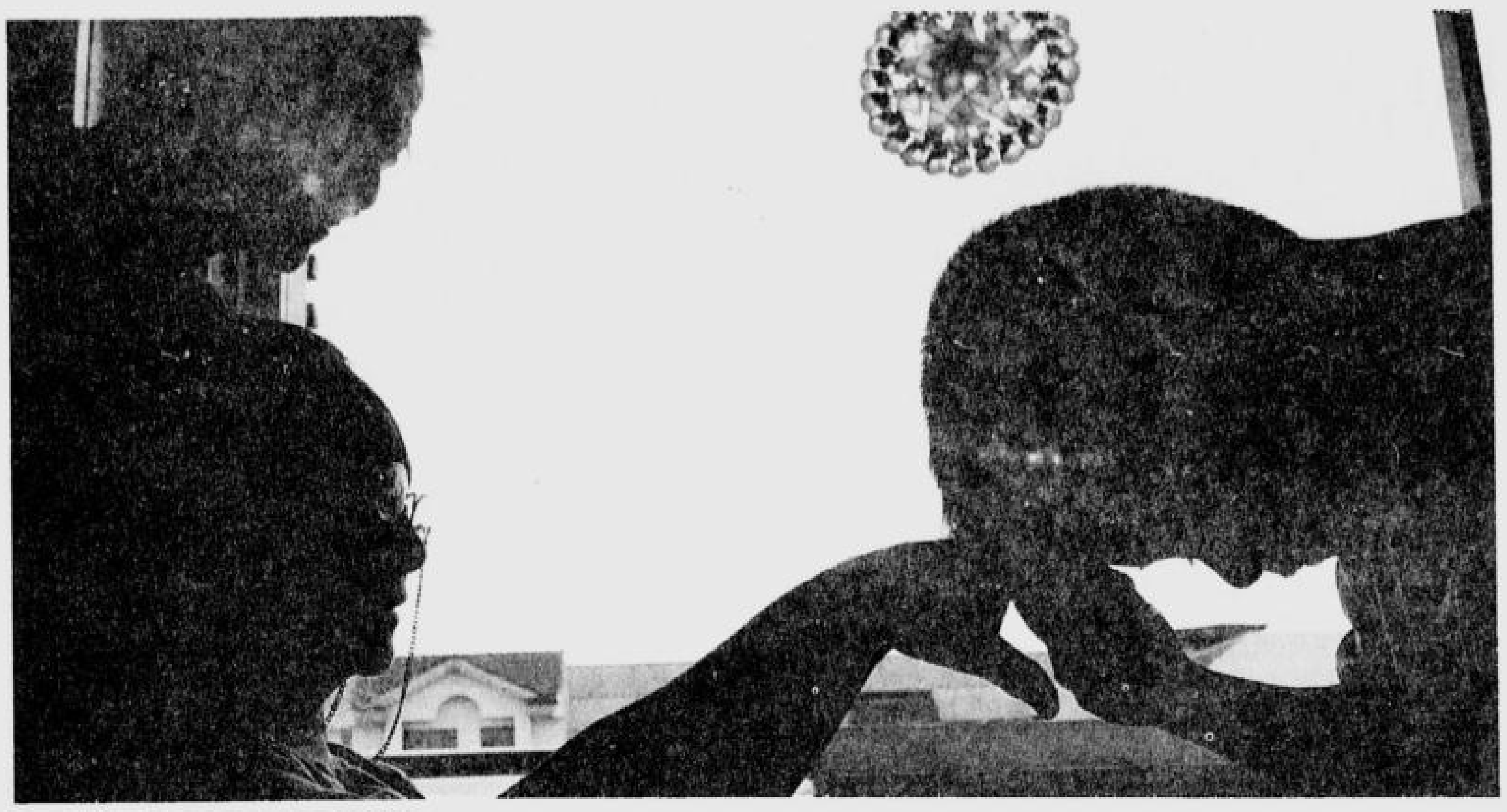
"That P100,000—that's just my taxi fare," the mother said. "Now I realize that the honor of a Filipino woman is that cheap."

As a result of the custody dispute, the US military recently announced the cancelation of next year's Balikatan, the annual war games between the two countries.

Hours after the cancelation was announced on Friday, the Office of the Solicitor General filed with the appellate court yet another agreement between the Philippines and the United States for Smith's return to the US Embassy, with Philippine authorities given "inspection rights."

Pozon, in junking Smith's request to be returned to US custody on Dec. 13, had ruled that "the custody of accused Smith by the US military authorities was terminated after the completion of the trial and rendition of judgment of conviction."

But the US Embassy, with the concurrence of the Philippine justice and foreign affairs departments, maintains that Smith's incarceration at the MCJ is in violation of the VFA.



FILIPINO LIVING TRADITION

Aside from being a Filipino gesture of respect for elderly people, the "mano" or the act of taking the hand and placing it on the forehead is practiced by the young when they visit their godparents on Christmas Day.

EDWIN BACASMAS

Mr. & Mrs. Santa serve 'noche buena' to poor

From page A1

because they were grateful to God for helping them recover a year after they lost millions in a big fire.

They initially gave food items to one barangay parish in 1995. Soon they expanded to Aplaya, Calamba City and Victoria town. Last year, they started sending food items to the poor in Pangil town, the easternmost part of Laguna.

Christmas trial

The philanthropist, however, went through his worst trial on Christmas Day last year.

He had just attended Mass and was driving the car to fetch his wife and daughter from home.

Unfortunately, he figured in a vehicular collision with a tricycle whose driver, a notorious drug addict in town, beat him up instead of settling the problem amicably.

"My assailant hit me with a brass knuckle. My face was covered with blood," the unfortunate benefactor told the INQUIRER.

Good Samaritan

A Good Samaritan passed by and stopped the tricycle driver from further beating him up.

The philanthropist crawled to his car and drove to the nearest police station to file a complaint. He was rushed to the hospital for medical attention.

Although he lost all his upper teeth, he thanked God he was alive. The idea of retaliation never occurred to him.

It could have been worse, he said. He could have been killed by the tricycle driver, were it not for the arrival of the Good Samaritan.

Secret

The philanthropist had wanted to keep this sad incident a secret.

He never even told his best friend—a priest, whose parishioners' were yearly recipients of the noche buena bags.

The priest, who happened to drop by the couple's residence a day after the accident, never suspected that something bad had befallen his trusted and generous friend.

Sometime in the middle of the year, the priest noticed something peculiar about the way his best friend spoke. He finally asked him what had happened.

Insights

The benefactor narrated his painful ordeal in the hands of the tricycle driver. Like a good Catholic, he said he had already put everything behind him.

He was even grateful that the incident happened because it gave him insights on how temporary life is.

He said his faith remained strong and he was grateful for God's countless blessings.

The blessings outweighed the bad things that happened in his life and inspired him to continue to help the poor.

Girl Scouts' coin banks send displaced ...

From page A1

oil for Petron Corp., polluted the seas off southern Guimaras. As a result, fish catch dwindled considerably; women and children stayed away from contaminated shellfish.

Without fishing, affected families depended on food given by relief organizations, government and charitable groups as well as the income derived from joining the cleanup of oil-smeared beaches. They are now awaiting compensation for the loss of their livelihood.

Drop in school attendance

A study commissioned by the province of Guimaras in October noted a 10-percent decline in school attendance in villages affected by the oil spill.

Mabugat, who is also a consultant in the office of Rafael Coscolluela, the presidential assistant for regional development, said parents had difficulty providing school allowance for their children.

Other parents have continued to give out allowance but they don't know for how long.

A week into the oil spill, children in the elementary grades stayed away from school, complaining of dizziness, vomiting, stomach pain, diarrhea, chest pain, nasal congestion, fever and cough, apparently the effect of toxic fumes, the study said.

Classes were moved to day-care centers, churches, chapels or community halls because some elementary schools are near the oil-smothered beaches.

Cynthia Lumampao of the National Economic Development Authority and Helen Villarico-Correa of the Commission on Higher Education (CHEd), who joined the study, said that they foresaw a continuing drop in school attendance in the next months and the decrease in enrollment for the next school year.

Lumampao said young girls might stop schooling.

"In the coming months, as the fishing industry is not fully back on its feet, we thought it is best to help the Girl Scouts and their families by giving them a little amount for school allowance and teaching them livelihood projects," Mabugat said.

Endelynn Ortega, the Girl Scout council executive for Iloilo and Guimaras, said the money from the coin banks would be given to Girl Scouts in the island villages of Nauway and Unisan, and Tando located in the mainland.

Appeal to sister Scouts

The coin banks were made in September from bamboo nodules in Maasin town, Iloilo. Distribution to Girl Scouts, Star Scouts and Twinklers troops began over the weekend in time for Christmas.

Ruth Jarantilla, who heads the Iloilo and Guimaras council, led the appeal for Iloilo Girl Scouts to help their sisters in Guimaras.

Aside from giving the Guimaras scouts allowances, the council plans to bring trainers to teach families how to make brooms from coconut midribs and produce herbed vinegars.

Coconuts abound in the three villages in Guimaras and they could be sources of products to be sold in Iloilo, Mabugat said.

Ortega said the scout council's help was a show of support to Guimaras Gov. JC Rahman Nava, who paid for the P35 registration fee of some 12,000 Guimaras Girl Scouts at the start of the school year in June.

There are a total of 46,000 Girl Scouts in Iloilo and Guimaras, with the Star Scouts and Junior Girl Scouts having the biggest number at 18,000 and 19,000, respectively.

Probe of other Abra political killings urged

From page A1

singing. He would give cash rewards to the best in dancing and singing," said the lawmaker's eldest daughter, Charrie.

The mood was more somber this time. Instead of the usual *queso de bola* and Christmas ham, the family had a repast of *lechon de leche*.

"We had our Christmas dinner in front of him," Charrie Bersamin said. "He wanted us to be happy during Christmas."

She said the family would not have her father's body lie in state at the nearby provincial capitol, as was expected for a local statesman.

"We were not invited and we would not pursue our request," she said.

Bersamin's body would be displayed at the Abra National High School instead.

Charrie said a constant visitor was the widow of La Paz Mayor Mark Ysrael Bernos, who was murdered in his hometown in January.

Because of her father's murder, Charrie said the families of slain political opposition leaders had asked for a reinvestigation of their murders.

Aside from Bersamin and Bernos, the slain officials were Mayor Clarence Benwaren of Tineg town and Mayor Jose Segundo of Tubo town.

P5-million project

Bersamin, 62, and his police bodyguard were killed outside the Mt. Carmel Church in Quezon City on Dec. 16.

Former Army M/Sgt. Rufino Panday, who was arrested three days later, told police investigators he acted as a lookout for a group that was hired by an Abra politician to kill Bersamin for P5 million.

Panday said the others in the project were former Vice Mayor Freddie Dupo of La Paz, Abra, alleged triggerman Dominador Barbosa, the driver of the getaway motorcycle Sonny Taculao, and a John Doe.

Panday, also an Abra native, disclosed that Dupo had told him that Gov. Vicente Valera masterminded the murder of Bersamin, who had reportedly planned to enter the gubernatorial race next year, possibly against Valera's wife who is the incumbent mayor of Bangued.

Valera has denied involvement in the slaying.

Lawyer Alfredo Villamor Sr., Bersamin's uncle, said Dupo was the vice mayor of the slain Bernos in La Paz.

"We recruited him (Dupo) and he later defected to the other camp for various reasons," Villamor said.

Bernos killing

Bernos was shot at close range while watching a basketball game at the plaza in La Paz on Jan. 13. Although some suspects were arrested, the murder remained unsolved.

A source, who requested not to be named, said Dupo, a former Philippine Constabulary member, disappeared after Bernos' death and was later seen with Governor Valera.

Bernos, 31, son of former Abra Gov. Andres Bernos, was reportedly being groomed to run for governor in the 2007 elections.

"We thought Dupo was kind and could not do such things," Villamor said.

Another source said Bernos had been careful about his security especially in his hometown. "That somebody was able to go to his back in the presence of his bodyguards meant that the triggerman was particularly close," the source said.

After shooting Bernos, the gunman and his companions fired warning shots to disperse people.

Police later recovered an M-16 rifle, a bonnet and a jacket from a restaurant, Nanay's Kusina, in the poblacion of La Paz. The eatery is owned by Carmencita Bernos, the late wife of the assassinated mayor's uncle and political opponent, Domingo Bernos.

Benwaren was gunned down on Oct. 29, 2002, inside the San Labrador Church in Calauan, Laguna, where he acted as wedding sponsor.

Similarities

The National Bureau of Investigation noticed the similarities in the murders of Benwaren and Bersamin.

Another case being reviewed by the police was the murder attempt on Lagayan Mayor Cecilia Luna, another known Valera critic.

Last year, Luna filed a case against Valera and Lt. Col. Noel Mislang for allegedly plotting to kill her and her sons. Luna based her case on the affidavits of Army Corporals Antonio Rosqueta and Eduardo Barcelona who had claimed that Valera had ordered their superior, Mislang, to kill her.

Rosqueta was killed in an ambush on Dec. 23, 2004, after filing his affidavit.

Barcelona surfaced and accused Mislang of masterminding the ambush, claiming that the gunmen were promised a reward of P300,000 for each member of the Luna clan they would kill.

Valera denied involvement in the murder attempt on Luna.

Segundo was killed allegedly by communist rebels on Dec. 27. 2001 in Tubo.

Valera can't be compelled

Also yesterday, police investigators admitted that they could not compel Valera to submit himself for investigation on the Bersamin murder.

Quezon City police chief Senior Supt. Magtanggol Gatdula, a member of Task Force Bersamin, said it did not have any power to summon Valera because it did not have solid evidence to pin down the governor.

Gatdula said it was all up to Valera to decide whether or not to submit himself to investigation.

"If we invite him, he can always decline. We are not insisting that he appear (before police)," he said.

Gatdula also said the National Bureau of Investigation was conducting its own investigation of the case.

Hence, Gatdula said he did not have any knowledge of the reported hold-departure order against Valera. *With a report from Alcuin Papa in Manila*

Revelers urged: Have Earth-friendly New Year

By DJ Yap

ADVICE FOR NEW YEAR REVELers: Greet 2007 with an Earth-friendly bang.

A group of environmentalists called the Ecowaste Coalition is pushing for a "toxic-free" New Year celebration and promoting the simple joys of blowing on the *torotot* (horn), shaking cans with pebbles and coins, banging on pots and pans, or simply knocking empty coconut shells together as the best ways to welcome 2007.

Unless, of course, one's idea of merriment is risking losing a finger or two, or even one's life, the group said.

Ecowaste recently launched "Ligtas Salubong 2007," a campaign against the use of firecrackers, PVC guns and cannons, as well as tire and trash burning, to greet the New Year.

These noise-making and lighting devices not only pose harm to human health but also endanger the environment, the group said.

It said the pollutant firecrackers included the "bawang," "sinturon ni Hudas," baby rocket, "trompillo" and sparklers, as well as the banned "atomic big triangulo," "pla-pla," "lolo thunder," "super lolo" and "watusi."

Safe, wise choices

"This campaign is meant to alert the public about the safety, chemical and noise hazards from using firecrackers and other pyrotechnic devices," said Ecowaste coordinator Rei Panaligan.

"It's also intended to remind us that nontoxic alternatives exist," he said.

The "safe and wise" choices include jiggling tambourines made of recycled bottle caps, striking bamboo sticks, and playing traditional musical instruments, Ecowaste said.

Even clapping one's hands and stamping one's feet, singing, dancing and shouting "Happy New Year!" at the top of one's voice are just as satisfying as any firecracker blast, it said.

Ecowaste launched its campaign at the Krus Na Ligas Elementary School in Diliman, Quezon City, where environmentalists, including Ms Earth-Water Cathy Untalan, blew on horns, banged pot covers, and rattled tambourines to demonstrate a safe way to greet the new year.

"I urge our citizens to switch to non-injurious and non-polluting ways of ushering in the New Year. The children, the elderly and the infirm would benefit the most from a safe and clean environment," Untalan said.

Injury figures

Citing data from the Department of Health, Ecowaste said 582 persons were injured by firecracker blasts from Dec. 21, 2005, to Jan. 1, 2006. Of the number, 20 percent (or about 120) were children nine years and below.

Most of the victims suffered burns, eye injuries, cuts and tetanus infection. Some of them had to have their fingers, toes and other extremities amputated, the group said.

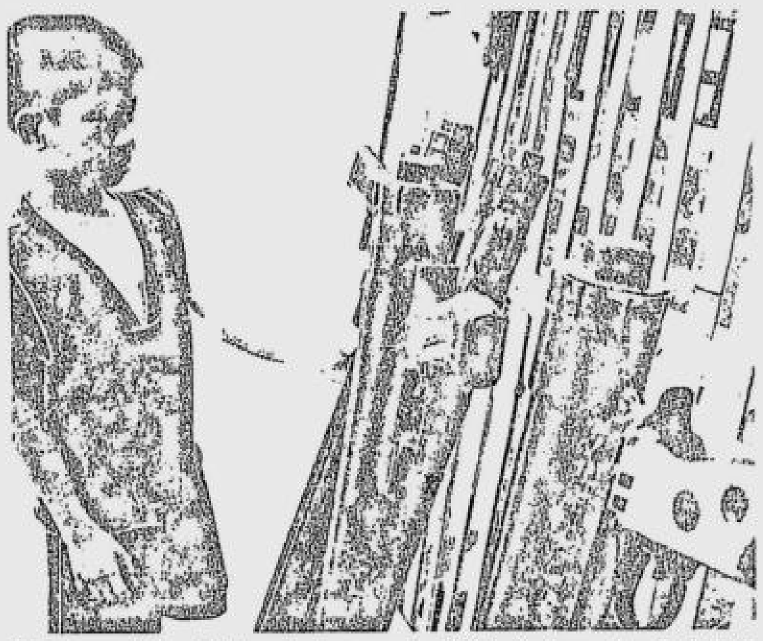
Ecowaste also called attention to the assorted chemicals, fine particulates and residual wastes released into the environment by firecracker explosions.

Firecrackers worsen air quality, causing a number of health problems among humans, including throat and chest congestion, especially for people with asthma and chemical allergies and sensitivities, it said.

This is on top of the noise pollution known to affect children and animals, Ecowaste said.

"A cleaner New Year's Eve celebration will no doubt lessen the elevated levels of air pollution in Metro Manila and other highly urban areas, and make breathing a life-sustaining experience for all," Panaligan said.

> 'I urge our citizens to switch to non-injurious and non-polluting ways of ushering in the New Year'



NOT exactly Earth-friendly, but popular PVC pipe bazookas find their way in Iloilo City. These are sold for P300 each.

ARNOLD ALMACEN/INQUIRER VISAYAS

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Tuesday, December 26, 2006
St. Stephen, First Martyr

1st Reading:	Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59
Gospel:	Matthew 10:17-22

Jesus said to his disciples, "Be on your guard with respect to people, for they will hand you over to their courts and they will flog you in their synagogues. You will be brought to trial before rulers and kings because of me, and so you may witness to them and the pagans.

"But when you are arrested, do not worry about what you are to say and how you are to say it; when the hour comes, you will be given what you are to say. For it is not you who will speak; but it will be the Spirit of your Father in you.

"Brother will hand over brother to death, and a father his child; children will turn against parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but whoever stands firm to the end will be saved."

Commentary

These days after the birth of the Child of God we look at what can happen if you are bound to this Child. Here we see Stephen the first martyr, filled with grace and power, described in some of the same terms as Jesus his Lord, speaking of the Word, forgiving those who kill him. And Jesus' words warn us that the Word in the world does not always call forth joy. It can also call forth anger and violence against those who speak of love, of nonviolence and forgiveness. We cannot be naïve or romantic about the coming of God into our world.

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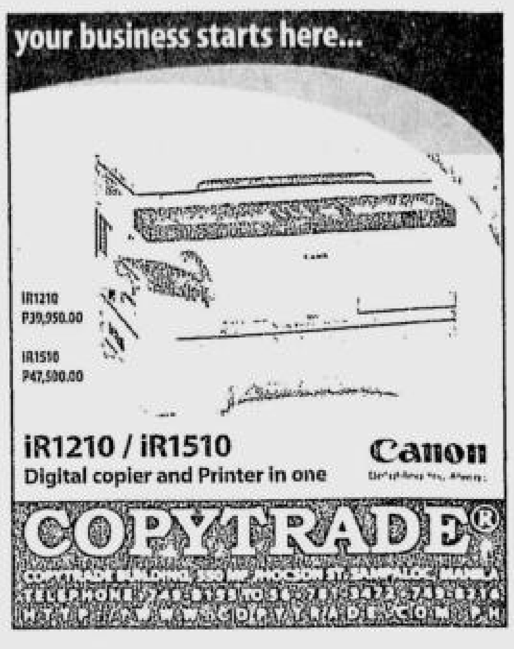

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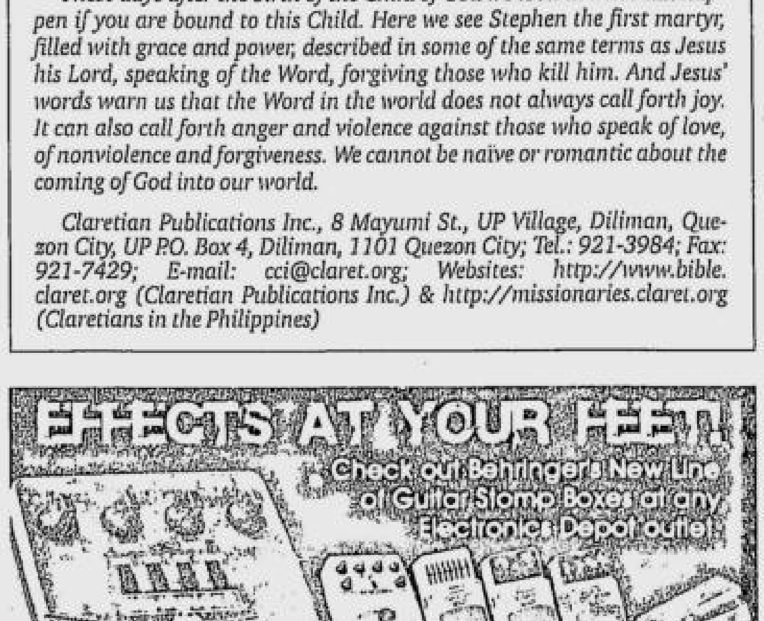

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OPINION

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An alternative

EDITORIAL

IN 2002 THE "KAPATIRAN PARA SA PANGKALAhatang Kabutihan (Political Movement for the Common Good)," decided to light a candle rather than curse the darkness that is Philippine politics. The Kapatiran offered an alternative in the 2004 elections, but like most quixotic ventures, it was noticed but made only a little headway in changing the nature of the nation's politics.

This year it is again presenting itself as an alternative in the 2007 elections. The Kapatiran said that it believes in "first things first"—that principles and platform must come before candidates. This would be quite a change from the common thinking in Philippine politics—that the candidate comes first, and that in a presidential election, a party must be built around a candidate. The principles and platforms can come later.

Most people may say that the principles and platform of the Kapatiran may be too idealistic and too quixotic to win popular acceptance. But they said the same thing about the concept of a "Gunless Society" at the beginning, but gradually, the idea is gaining acceptance as a solution to the gun-driven violence and mayhem that have become a feature of Philippine society and politics. It is no coincidence that Nandy Pacheco, the guru of the Gunless Society, is the secretary-general and one of the founders of the Kapatiran.

Some may say that the principles and platform of the Kapatiran are full of motherhood statements. But they also get down to the nitty-gritty of things, such as a call to require candidates for President, Vice President, senator and congressman to possess a college or university degree. Now this makes sense, although some people would say that it is an elitist requirement. But would we rather have dumb, uneducated celebrities than educated, thinking intellectuals running our government?

The Principles of the Kapatiran bear the imprint of the Catholic lay people that make up the core of the organization's leadership. They declare their belief in Almighty God, the dignity and sacredness of the human person, the rights and responsibilities of every person, a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the dignity of work and the rights of workers, solidarity, care for God's creation and peace and active nonviolence. They prescribe the Christian way of running a government and a society: the way of love, brotherhood and peaceful solidarity.

All planks of the party's platform have spiritual, moral and social dimensions. In line with the call of Archbishop Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales and Archbishop Angel Lagdameo for "character change," the Kapatiran calls for character building, good citizenship and basic political education and values formation. The platform stresses education as a way out of the spiritual, moral, economic, social and political morass in which Philippine society now finds itself. It calls, for instance, for increased investment in human resource development, especially by strengthening education in the sciences, mathematics, engineering and English.

The Kapatiran would abolish the pork barrel, give the highest priority to projects and programs for the underprivileged and other neglected sectors of society, speed up the administration of justice, ensure transparency and accountability in government transactions, and promote a safe, clean and healthy environment.

Its plank on a multidimensional approach to peace and order is the longest in the entire platform. By now most of the proposals are familiar to readers: making it a criminal offense for anyone but police officers or soldiers and licensed private security [officers] in uniform and on duty, to carry firearms or any other deadly weapon in public places, an increase in the penalty for illegal possession of firearms or violation of the firearms law, etc.

The Kapatiran is calling on morally upright and competent servant-leaders who subscribe to the principles and platform of the Kapatiran to run for national and local offices in the 2007 elections. The pragmatic politicos may scoff at the Kapatiran's principles and platform as being too idealistic, too quixotic to gain popular acceptance. But remember that in Don Quixote, the novel, toward the end the pragmatic Sancho Panza began to accept the wisdom of the hero's idealism. And in the real world, the Green parties in Europe and other parts of the world in the beginning were hardly noticed but are now making their influence felt in national politics.

Too idealistic? Too quixotic? But as the Chinese proverb goes, it's always better to light a candle than curse the darkness.

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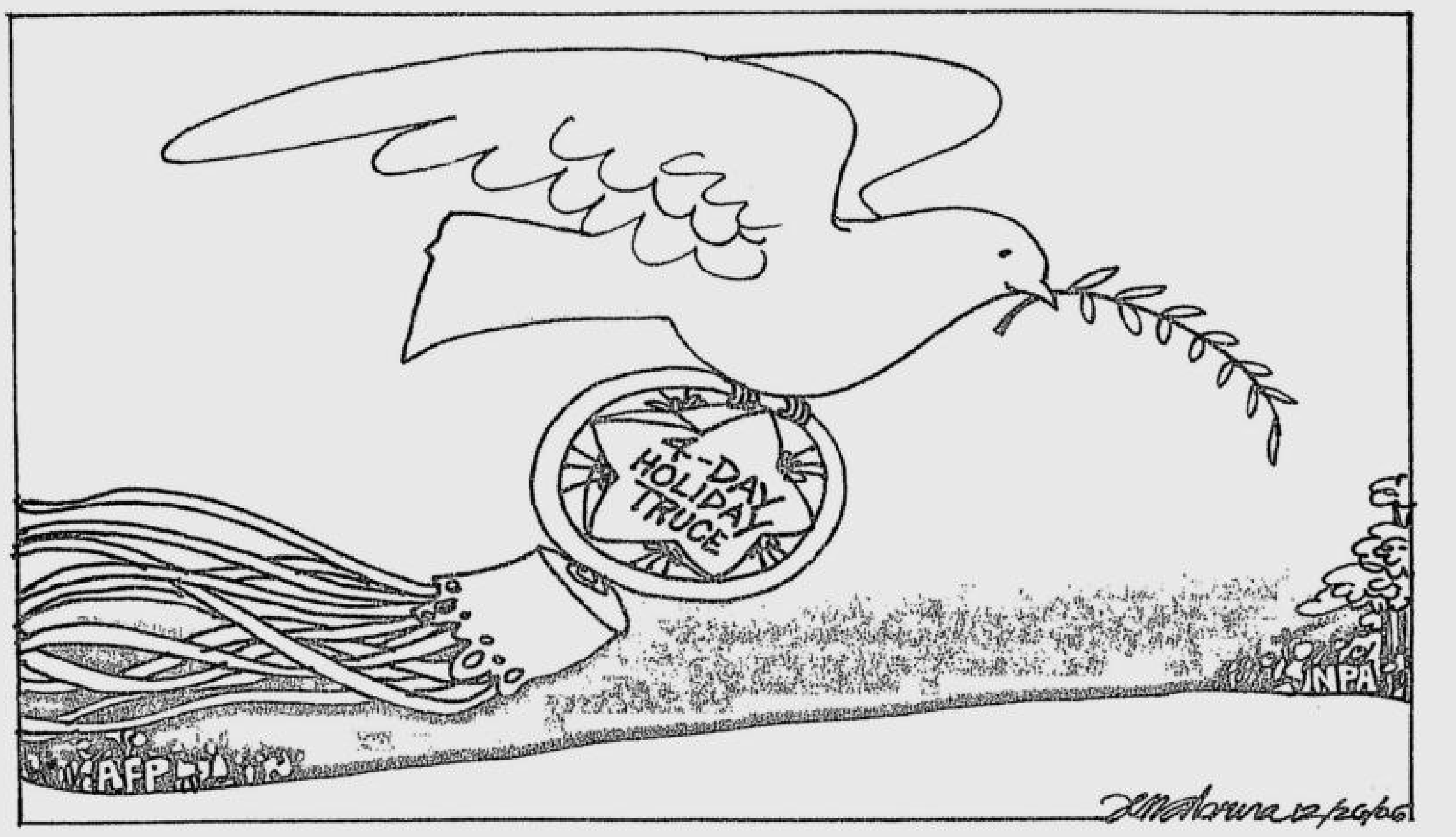

Post-Christmas 'burps'

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

AMID THE LITTER OF A NOCHE BUENA dinner table, empty bottles and ripped gift wrappers, the guest burped: "Christmas is indigestion."

Want another viewpoint? Try walking on Christmas morning through the children's charity ward of a government hospital. The wife and I did.

Star lanterns and wreaths deck "Pediatrics" at the Cebu City Medical Center. But it's a different universe of match-stick limbs, emaciated features and whimpers. Each of the over 30 beds are crammed with two ill kids each—plus an anxious parent or sleepless watcher squeezed in between.

Like other fund-short and overcrowded public hospitals, CCMC serves the poorest. Patients limp in from dengue-infested slums where clean water, unlike shabu, is hard to come by. Others come from hunger-strapped barangays. This ward reminds one of what the deaf and sightless educator Helen Keller (1880-1968) once said: "The only really blind person on Christmas day is he who does not have Christmas in his heart."

Half of bed 19 is occupied by a skin-and-bones infant, attached to an IV tube. Even the untrained eye can see the kid may not pull through. The mother grips a stack of heavily creased prescription slips for urgently needed medicines. But the hospital pharmacy is perennially short of drugs. And she has exactly P20.

Across the aisle, the other half of bed 8 has a 4-year-old boy, down with pneumonia. He needs antibiotics. "He hasn't gotten a single injection," the distraught father, a jobless laborer, explains. The little money we share with patients in beds 19 and 8 is all we have, we explain to five others who desperately cluster around.

Yet, this is a country of many persons with great wealth. "If you know how rich you are, you are not rich," Imelda Marcos once said. "But me, I am not aware of the extent of my wealth. That's how rich we are. "

Our definitions of what is necessary is changing, says an earlier UNDP Human Development Report. "Distinction between what are luxuries and necessities is blurring." Is Viagra a necessity while antibiotics turn into a luxury? What is human can be overwhelmed by appetites not shaped by the Christmas vision…

But "trend is not destiny." It is also possible to correct our distorted priorities, which cause food, medicine, supplies and even human warmth, to perennially run short. "There is enough for man's needs," Mahatma Gandhi pointed out. "But there is never enough for his greed."

A Christmas morning visit gives a "human face" to sawdust-dry data you've glanced at, between INQUIRER deadlines. In infants, up to 2 years of age, anemia "continued to increase and is alarmingly high" (53 percent), the 6th National Nutrition Survey says—a study crippled by congressional fund cuts. Out of every 10 infants, 6 months to 1-year-old, six suffered from debilitating anemia.

Most of these kids are here because they lack what we take for granted: three square meals a day, clean water, a roof over our heads, schools—even reserved plots in grass-trimmed memorial cemeteries. Our children are routinely vaccinated against TB, measles, hepatitis, etc. and have orthodontists squeeze in "tin-grin" braces. Can the Christmas manager teach them to share with those who lose out in this "ovarian lottery"?

Stemming from poverty, chronic hunger unleashes anemia among pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. Almost half (44 percent) of women on the family way are anemic, the nutrition survey found. So are 4 out of every 10 who breastfeed. You saw them in bed Nos. 11 and 18.

"Four times now, I've poured the water of emergency baptism on dying kids in Pediatrics," I wrote in August 1988. "I'm afraid they'll not be the last."

Yesterday, a mother, by bed 14, urgently tagged at my sleeve and said, "Please, sir. My child is very ill."

"*Ego te baptizo…*" Her son was the fifth.

"Like runners, generations pass on the torch of life," Lucretius once wrote. But they also hand on the frailties. Lack of Vitamin A, iron and iodine in mothers saps intelligence quotients of the babies in their wombs or suckling at their breasts. IQs of poorly nourished children can be whittled down by 10 to 14 percent, says the Asian Development Bank. "Cognitive loss" is 10 percent for stunted individuals and "4 percent for iodine-deficient victims." Worse, that loss can not be recovered. It is irreversible.

Reduced mental capacity is not visible. So, it rarely triggers alarm bells. But doors in the future slam shut for children as their learning capacities are stunted. "Their elevators don't go all the way to the top floor," the wry comment goes. But it's no laughing matter when our kids come in 37th out of 38 countries that signed up for the International Mathematics and Science examinations.

Exiting from "Pediatrics" into the Christmas morning sunlight, we recalled an earlier visit where we chanced upon an almost totally blind girl, singing softly to herself. She was all of 5—too young to sing "of old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago." Early treatment could have saved her sight, the emaciated mother explained. But somehow, they could never scrape up enough coins for the jeepney fare to bring her to the hospital. One eye had given way; now, the second was in danger of going.

"Christmas is the day that holds all time together," Alexander Smith writes. It also helps lift our eyes to see beyond our narrow lives. For nothing is more pathetic than those who are unable to see the difference between pebbles and diamonds.

* * *

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You

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

THAT WAS A VERY INTERESTING PERSON of the Year Time Magazine chose this year. I couldn't agree more.

That Person of the Year is "You." You, the individual reader, the individual person, the individual occupier of space on this planet, are Time's choice as the one living being that had the greatest impact on the world this year. Traditional wisdom, which owes to Thomas Carlyle, says the history of the world is just the biography of great men. Not so, says Time. Or no longer so today.

"Look at 2006… and you'll see another story, one that isn't about conflict or great men. It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing…."

Thomas Friedman already noted this development in his 2002 book "Longitudes and Attitudes." He posited that to understand 9/11, you had to understand the broad canvas behind it. That broad canvas was what was happening to the nation-state. Three things in particular, he said, had changed dramatically.

The first was the relation between nation-states. We have only one superpower left, which is the United States, which has to deal with a host of small nation-states. The second was the relation between nation-states and global markets, or economic globalization. And the third was the relationship between nation-states and individuals.

"Because globalization has brought down many of the walls that limited the movement and reach of people, and because it has simultaneously rewired the world into networks, it gives more power to *individuals* to influence both markets and nation-states than at any other time in history. Whether by enabling people to use the Internet to communicate instantly at almost no cost over vast distances, or by enabling them to use the Web to transfer money to obtain weapons designs that normally would have to be controlled by states … globalization can be an incredible force-multiplier for individuals. Individuals can increasingly act on the world stage directly, unmediated by the state."

I myself have been writing about this from quite another perspective, which is the digital revolution. Its enormous impact I saw during Edsa II. To this day, I maintain that one of the most critical factors that took Erap out was the Filipino community abroad which made their sentiments known through the e-mail and cellular phone. The volume of e-mail that landed in the Inquirer Online at that time was phenomenal. Unlike Edsa I, which reduced the Filipinos abroad largely to spectators, Edsa II elevated the Filipinos abroad to the status of active participants. That was so because of the new technology, which allowed them to take part in the dramatic events in this country in real time, or near-real time. They might as well have been here, if in virtual form.

That technology has made even more tremendous strides since then. The prediction that TV, communications and computers would soon merge has come true. Tomorrow is today, as witness the cellular phones that can receive TV signals and do computing work.

Since Edsa II I've been repeatedly saying that the new technology will alter profoundly our concept of news—and sooner than we think. Online News, in particular, has added whole new meanings to the word "interactive." "News" is no longer an etched-in-tablet, handed-down from heaven, final word on the subject. It is something completely correctable—and correctable almost as soon as it sees life online. You will get an instant reaction on it from grateful or irate readers. What makes Wikipedia truly wondrous isn't just that it is one colossal encyclopedia freely available to everyone. It is that its version of the "truth" can be changed anytime. In fact, it actively encourages readers to send additions and corrections to its entries.

I've been telling NGOs all this time that at no time has their work become more viable. Traditional sources of authority are being subverted every day by a technology that is allowing more and more people to have more say in how things are run, or ought to be run. Of course, that includes them: their own authority is being subverted by a technology that is allowing individuals with a computer and a telephone to unburden themselves of their 10 cents' worth on any issue that takes their fancy.

The last suggests the downside to all this. As Time notes, "Web 2.0 harnesses the stupidity of crowds as well as its wisdom" and "some of the comments on YouTube make you weep for the future of humanity just for the spelling alone, never mind the obscenity and the naked hatred." And as Friedman suggests, you can use the Web as much to foment iniquity as end tyranny, as much to hatch terrorist plots as stop plots to mount dictatorships.

But I'm personally hopeful, and not a little excited, about democracy coming out ahead rather than behind from these developments. Democracy itself is like that, too: it allows crackpots, as much as sages, to have their say on how things ought to be. But collective wisdom has been known to drown out collective madness in the end, which is still what makes the worst democracy better than the best dictatorship.

Democracy has always meant a strong people, not a strong government; a strong citizenry, not a strong republic. If that's the case, then I'm hopeful that with the strengthening of the individual voice today we may yet survive our corrupt leaders and obscene dancers (not the strip-teasers, the Cha-cha-ers) and become a truly strong and free nation. The future doesn't lie with them, they just know how to lie. It lies with:

You.

A Christmas folk tale

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

THERE IS AN OLD FOLK TALE ABOUT TREES and their dreams, which is told to little children at Christmastime, but it can be for kids, as Frank Sinatra used to sing, "from 1 to 95." This tale was put together by my schoolmate at the old Holy Ghost College, Elisa del Mundo-Bengzon, to introduce her remarks during the birthday celebration for her aunt, the icon of pediatric medicine in the Philippines, Dr. Fe del Mundo, who recently turned 95. The tale goes this way:

Once upon a time there were thousands of trees in the Holy Land. At night the trees told their dreams to each other. One tree wanted to travel across oceans and see the world it had heard so much about from the birds who built nests on its branches. Another tree wanted to be a treasure box for jewels and to be treasured by someone. The third tree just wanted to be a tree to grow toward the clouds and sleep with its head among the stars and its roots intertwined with other roots.

But the day came when men cut down all the trees. One of the trees was sold to fishermen who made it into a boat. The other tree was sold to shepherds who made it into a feed box for animals in a cave. The third tree was stored in the bottom of a pile of wood in a lumber yard.

One day, on a cold winter night, a young couple took shelter in the cave where the woman gave birth to a baby boy and placed him in a feed box. Thus, the box for feeding lambs and goats became a treasure chest for that precious child.

Many years later, the fishing boat, already worn and old, was taken out on the lake at night, when a storm came up. The fishermen woke up a man who was asleep in the bow of the boat, and he ordered the wind and the waves to be quiet. The boat saw with the eyes of faith the kingdom of this man.

The third tree lay forgotten in the lumber yard for a long time, until one day it was taken out to the streets and dropped on the shoulders of a man bleeding from a crown of thorns and numerous wounds on his body. The man dragged the tree up a hill where the soldiers then nailed him to it until he died. At dawn of the third day after his crucifixion and death, the man came back to the top of the hill, blessed the tree and it started to bloom and grow tall again.

* * *

Bengzon, tying that story of the trees and their dreams to Del Mundo's life, said the feed box symbolizes the treasure of the doctor's life and all the achievement and excellence awards she earned in a lifetime of caring for children, mothers, families and communities. The boat, said Elisa, is her hospital, where countless patients have been sheltered and healed from the storms of illness and suffering. And the cross is her labor of love that has saved the lives of sick children, restored them to health to grow and follow their own dreams.

But that's the beauty of these all-time tales: there's something for everyone. The age-old story of Christmas began on that first winter night in Bethlehem when the God-Man was born in a cave and lay in a feed box amid the animals. It will remain relevant till the end of time, as long as love and hope reign in the hearts of men everywhere.

* * *

Love and hope are also behind the success of Fr. Pierre Tritz's efforts to rescue poor students from the vicious grip of poverty and the dropout syndrome, through the Erda Foundation. Recently I was invited to a sharing by two alumni of Erda Technical-Vocational High School, a school in Pandacan which Tritz founded in the early 1990s in order to train students from the very poor families in Metro Manila in vocational skills under the dual-tech system. He has always taught that the best way to break the vicious cycle of poverty is to train the poor in skills they can use for gainful employment.

* * *

Mary Angeline Armena recounted how fortunate she was to train in general drafting with AutoCAD at Erda Tech, while acquiring values like perseverance, punctuality and discipline. Her skills were further honed during her fifth year at Erda, while undergoing in-plant training with WSP (Philippines) Inc. for five months, where she was assigned in the mechanical electrical plumbing and fire services department under the supervision of engineers. In between CAD work, she was tasked to assist the document controller in both civil and structural and MEPF areas. Her all-around training in WSP Asia ended in a job offer after her graduation from Erda Tech. Soon WSP, aware of her family's financial difficulties, offered her a college scholarship. Now Mary Angeline is a sophomore student in mechanical engineering at the Rizal Technological University while working with WSP Asia.

* * *

Ray An Gulin, 19, works in the pastry section of Westin Philippine Plaza. It's a dream that wouldn't have been possible were it not for Erda Tech and Fr. Tritz. Ray An, whose grandmother runs a *carinderia*, said that at first he had second thoughts about enrolling in that school because its five-year curriculum would cause him to "lose" a year. But he entered just the same and soon realized that his Erda high school education and training was to be "my passport in finding work." At Erda Tech he chose the food and beverage servicing course. He had his in-plant training at Red Ribbon Bakeshop in Libis, Quezon City, where he learned how to work more efficiently by following the company's procedures. Graduating from Erda Tech in 2004, he was hired by Westin in the banquet "spiral" where he learned all about making "delicious desserts" while working in its open kitchen before the guests. He encountered many difficulties at first, but he told himself that "no work is easy, and no one succeeds without experiencing failures." Today he has a good working relationship with his co-workers and his pastry skills have improved considerably.

Mary Angeline and Ray An come from very poor families, but thanks to Fr. Tritz, who early on was determined to help break the vicious cycle of lack of training and poverty, they now have a bright future. Stories of love and hope in this season of grace.

Stray cats and honesty

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

I KNOW THE GIFT-GIVING SEASON IS SUPposed to have ended yesterday, though a few stragglers will try to beat the deadline by Jan. 1 (those adhering to Spanish tradition have until the Feast of the Three Kings), but here's a gift suggestion that I couldn't write about earlier because I had to find the time to watch it.

I have known filmmaker (and sometime TV producer) Ellen Ongkeko Marfil for some time, and when "Mga Pusang Gala," the "indie" movie she directed and produced, was first released, we exchanged texts each time there was a screening. But for some reason or other—mainly the fact that it's difficult for me to find someone to watch Filipino films with—I couldn't make it to any of the film showings.

Now the uncut version of "Mga Pusang Gala" is out in VCD format, with additional footage not included in the original version. The local distributor is Videoflick, which likewise markets other indies such as "Big Time" and "Roomboy," and the VCD is available in almost all video stores nationwide.

I'm encouraging everyone to get a copy of the "Pusang Gala" VCD, as well as that of other local movies, to encourage Filipino filmmakers and help fund their efforts. Ellen, for one, has opted for a "royalty" arrangement with the distributor because, she says, "the whole project is an educational investment for me plus the fact that I advocate a sharing of risks and therefore of harvest, as well." It's also a fact that if sales prove brisk, the distributor could very well find it rewarding to continue to support indies, fostering the growth and development of the industry.

* * *

BUT you don't even need to buy a "Mga Pusang Gala" VCD for altruistic reasons. Watch it if only for the experience, for two hours' worth of laughter and tears, and for a new and fresh view on human relationships and emotional entanglements, wherever these may lead us.

Marta (Irma Adlawan) and Boyet (Ricky Davao) are next-door neighbors, the best of friends, kindred spirits who share not just common interests and outlook on life but also a shared romantic fate.

Both have a tendency to fall for the wrong men—an emotionally remote, commitment-phobic businessman for Marta, and a manipulative uncaring laborer for Boyet, who by the way is a romance novelist but has of late been running out of romantic inspiration.

How do two middle-aged individuals, by themselves spunky, creative and independent, find happiness in a world where their neediness is rewarded by indifference and exploitation? The film, based on the Palanca Award-winning play by Jun Lana, with screenplay written by Lana and Rody Vera, lurches from reality to fantasy.

Boyet uses Marta's life and her romantic disasters as the basis of his latest novel, but while he creates a satisfying ending for his character, the reality for his friend is far harsher. Marta, meanwhile, envies Boyet's emotional availability and the little family he has created with himself, his adopted son Jojo whom he meets as a teenage pickpocket, and his lover Dom. But this family is in fact rooted in shallow—if not deceptive—soil, and falls into ruins one cathartic night.

* * *

IRMA Adlawan is luminous—in both physical and emotional senses—in this film. She looks remarkably well for a woman way past her "sell by" date, her advertising executive embodying both sensitivity and strength, vulnerable to the manipulation of her unreliable lover but buoyed by a sense of her own worth and strength of will.

Davao is a comfortable presence, lumpy like an old sofa, and even in scenes where he imagines how he would get even with his heartless lover, his soft features betray the sentiments underneath.

The entire film is bathed in a warm, golden glow, rendering the domestic scenes in Boyet's and Marta's small quarters a gorgeous intimacy. I especially loved the scene in which Marta's boyfriend chases her around her dining room and they end up making love atop the dining table. It is indeed sexually explicit, but also funny and romantic, conveying just why the smart and saucy Marta finds it difficult to break off from this man who clearly does not deserve her.

What "Mga Pusang Gala" tells us is that everyone—regardless of self-identification or sexual orientation—is after the same thing: meaning, commitment and intimacy. But life often thwarts even our best intentions, and surviving the hurts and resisting the temptation to hurt others in turn is the very definition of a live lived well.

* * *

"MGA Pusang Gala" has won recognition here and abroad, winning as First Feature at Frameline 30 in San Francisco, the oldest and biggest LGBT film festival, where it was picked up by Ariztical Entertainment for worldwide distribution. The movie is now making the rounds of foreign film festivals in Fribourg, New York, Dallas, Chicago, Quebec, Montreal and Melbourne. In the Philippines, it was chosen one of the "Best Three Films" for 2005 by Pasado, a group of educators.

"Feminists, I believe, are torn about liking and hating it," writes Ellen. "Some love it while others have just kept quiet. Even among gays, I have received extreme reactions."

I suspect such mixed reactions are due to the neediness and vulnerability displayed by Marta and Boyet, defying the feminist myth of emotional independence as a requisite for self-respect. But when we go beyond our self-imposed labels and look into what is truly in our minds and hearts, we find that we are all human, all subject to hurt and harm, but also to triumph and transcendence.

We are all weaker and stronger than we think we are—and being honest about it, as this movie is, is the first step to self-realization.

China's decrepit population

WORLD VIEW

Friedrich Wu

CHINA'S GOVERNMENT FINALLY APPEARS TO be acknowledging the urgent challenges presented by the country's aging population. On Dec. 12, it released a cabinet-level "white paper" on the problem—the first of its kind—in an effort to grapple with the prospect of rising social-security and healthcare costs, a tightening labor market, and other potential obstacles to continue rapid economic growth.

Looking back, it is ironic that the Chinese government's draconian "one-child" policy, imposed in 1979, was implemented at the same time as the "open door" policy, aimed at capturing labor-intensive foreign manufacturing investment. While both policies must be regarded as successes, over the years the family planning program has contributed to an aging population that may diminish China's attractiveness as a low-cost, labor-intensive manufacturing hub.

During the nearly three decades since the "one-child" policy was introduced, live births have dropped from 22.5 million per year in the early 1980s to around 16-17 million by the middle of this decade. Moreover, with the number of elderly growing as a result of rising life expectancy, this low birth rate has pushed the share of those aged 65 and above from 4.9 percent of the total population to 7.7 percent.

According to the United Nations Population Division's (UNPD) "medium-variant" projections, without reform of the "one-child" policy, the share of China's population aged 15 and below would decline from 24.8 percent in 2000 to 15.7 percent in 2050, while the share of those aged 65 and above would soar from 6.8 percent to 23.6 percent. With fewer children to replenish the workforce, the working-age cohort of those 15-64 years old would shrink from 68.4 percent to 60.7 percent. The elderly would thus account for a far greater share of China's population than in other large emerging economies, such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Mexico.

China's demographic trends hold several adverse implications for its economy. With a rapidly aging population and a shrinking workforce, tax revenue will contract, while expenditure on pensions and health care will expand, undermining the fiscal position. Various estimates by private-sector economists and World Bank officials suggest that the government's accumulated "net implicit pension debt" could balloon to 75-110 percent of GDP.

Furthermore, the decline in the working-age cohort would squeeze labor supply, fueling wage growth and eroding the country's economic competitiveness. Already, in the Yangtze and Pearl River Deltas, where manufacturing activity is the densest, labor shortages have appeared. In 2004, for example, Guangdong Province had to raise the mandatory minimum wage by as much as 20 percent to attract workers from other regions. To hire and retain skilled workers, many foreign-invested enterprises routinely pay above the minimum wage.

But some foreign manufacturers, seeking to cap rising labor costs, are shifting production from China to cheaper destinations such as Vietnam, where average monthly wages for factory workers is $50-60—half that of China. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Vietnam grew by 40 percent in 2005, led by investors from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. China's inward FDI fell 1.2 percent in the first seven months of 2006, after a 0.5 percent decline in 2005, while combined investment from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan plummeted 31 percent in the first half of 2006, compared to the 6.5 percent decline in 2005.

These figures are only the early warnings of an emerging trend. In the long run, as labor shortages become acute, China will need to relinquish some low-end, labor-intensive manufacturing activities, which will translate into decelerating export performance and lower economic growth.

Aside from abandoning the "one-child" policy, China could avoid this outcome by climbing the value chain in manufacturing and services, as Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan have done. However, for China to succeed, higher investment in research and development, together with a fundamental overhaul of the educational system, is essential.

According to OECD estimates, China's current expenditure on R&D amounts to only 1.3 percent of GDP, compared to 3.2 percent in Japan and an average of 2.5-2.6 percent in South Korea, Taiwan and the United States. Although the government recently announced that it intends to increase R&D spending to 2 percent of GDP by 2010, this remains below the OECD average of 2.2 percent.

As for China's backward educational system, the large number of university graduates is offset by their overall sub-standard quality. According to a recent survey by McKinsey & Company, of the more than three million graduates churned out by China's universities and colleges every year, less than 10 percent are suitable for employment with international companies, owing to their deficiencies in practical training and poor English.

In view of these systemic weaknesses, China's ability to overcome its labor deficit by shifting to an innovation- and productivity-driven economy remains dubious. **Project Syndicate**

Friedrich Wu is a senior research associate at the National University of Singapore's East Asian Institute.

So young and so brave

YOUNG BLOOD

Adelette H. dela Paz

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—**Ed.**

IT TOOK ME THREE YEARS TO WRITE THIS PIECE. EVEN then, I had to force myself to do it so that I can tell the world how great and foolish at the same time my brother AP is.

AP had a very promising future. He was always among the top three in his class during his grade school and high school years. When he graduated from high school, Mom cried tears of happiness as she pinned the Valedictorian Medal on his new, white polo shirt bought especially for the occasion.

A month after his graduation, AP went on to attend college at one of the premiere universities in the country, the University of the Philippines. Mom, Dad and I are all graduates of UP and there was neither question nor doubt that AP would follow in our footsteps. He even surprised us all by picking a pre-med course. He told us he planned to pursue medicine, and though we knew that it would be hard on our family's finances, nobody questioned his ambition. Smart as he is, AP was worth every spending all that money on.

But his stay at UP transformed my brother into a completely different individual, with radically different views. During his second semester at the university, he met someone from the *kilusan*, the underground leftist movement, and a few weeks later, he became a member. The *kilusan* is an organization of students and non-students who believe that economic changes and the development of our country can only be achieved through a revolution of the working class or an armed struggle. They believe in the concretization of an ideal: communism. I know because when I was in college, I was also a member of the *kilusan*.

The changes we noticed in AP were tolerable at first. He joined late-night discussion groups on the economic ideas of Karl Marx. I saw his books, and they were the same books I had read when I was in the movement. In his room were fliers and leaflets of every school rally the *kilusan* mounted. He eventually joined community-based information dissemination activities and met people who urged him to work full-time for the *kilusan*.

It was when he decided to do that that the situation became painful for all of us. He stopped coming home every day during his second year at the university. By then, he was no longer just a participant in school rallies, but a spokesperson for the students. He had turned into a leader.

He began to join major rallies and mobilizations on the national level. We would often see his picture in the newspapers, and I would cry silently in my room, afraid of what might happen to him. But he was not afraid of the consequences of his being so vocal about his anti-government views. He was so young, so honest and so brave.

He gave up a lot of things he used to love so much. My heart bled every time I would see him in person or in a news photo wearing torn and dirty jeans and a ragged T-shirt. It was not because he didn't have decent clothes; he had left his entire wardrobe at home and vowed never to wear such clothes again because they made him look "bourgeois." He began to hate brands, malls, restaurants and fine food because they made him feel guilty, knowing most other Filipinos could not afford such things. He hated money because, he said, it made people unequal.

What really hurt us was that he kept an emotional distance from everyone. He rarely talked. He stopped laughing. During the very few times he spent at home, he would go up to the rooftop late at night alone with our old wooden guitar. I would follow him and listen quietly to him sing the revolutionary love songs which he knew I loved so much. Then I would cry, knowing he was a world away from us despite our constant efforts to pull him back to ours.

One afternoon when he was on his third year at the university, he came home and packed whatever was left of his things. Our house help tried to stop him from leaving, but he would not be deterred. His letter to Mom and Dad explained it all. He said he was going to work for the *kilusan* on a full-time basis and he did not say when he would come back. He had given up his studies to pursue his belief. He was gone.

Mom began having episodes of depression after that. Dad became even more distant.

I got in touch with some of my old friends from the *kilusan* so I could ask about my brother. After a month of endless calls and secret meetings, I found out that AP was up in the mountains in the south. He was training to become a revolutionary. But he was safe.

I cried with relief when I heard the news. Later, I told Mom and Dad but although they were happy to hear the news, they could not hide their fear.

From the moment he joined the *kilusan* to the very day he left us, I never disagreed with my brother's decision. I never confronted him about it, which was what my parents always did. After all, I was once like him and I believed in his cause. I walked the same path of fear that he did and met the same characters. We were so much alike, except that I had to give it up in the end because I couldn't bear to see my parents feeling so very unhappy.

My brother is different. He is strong and firm and very brave, but still it was foolish of him to turn his back on his family.

I will always miss him. The old guitar that he loves so much still stands quietly in the corner of my room. One of the strings snapped during one of my attempts to learn to play it as well as he does. Its surface is no longer as glossy as when it was new; my tears have made it rough and stained. But playing that old guitar is the only way I can remember my brother without a trace of guilt. I can pretend that he is still up there in the rooftop, playing the same old love songs for me.

Adelette H. dela Paz, 28, works as a recruitment coordinator.

NOTICE TO YOUNGBLOOD CONTRIBUTORS:

Send your contributions by e-mail to youngblood@inquirer.com.ph together with your address, age and the school, course and year you're enrolled in or, if employed, the position you're holding and the company you work with. Contributions to Youngblood should not have been previously published.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER LETTERS

Ombudsman dared to file cases vs local officials

THE EXPRESS AND PUBLIC ADMISSION of local government executives from Western Visayas that "they received gifts from President GMA"—ranging from P20,000 to P50,000 each—is truly revolting to our sensibilities. Clearly, it shows that our bureaucracy is very sick, and bereft of morality and decency.

Government officials flaunt and take pride in the crimes they commit and profit from. Receiving monetary gifts on any occasion, including Christmas, is a crime punishable under the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, Presidential Decree No. 46, and Code of Conduct of Public Officials.

Mayor Liberty Manzano of Candoni, Negros Occidental and other local executives who publicly admitted that "she received P20,000 from a member of the 'staff' of President Arroyo" must be criminally prosecuted pursuant to the above-cited penal statutes.

The criminal nature of the act is buttressed by the public declaration of Mayor Manzano which gave the appearance that "The money which Manzano described as a 'Christmas gift' from the President, was handed to them after they signed a manifesto supporting Charter change (Cha-cha) through a constituent assembly (Con-ass). One Hundred one town mayors, 14 city mayors and four governors in Western Visayas signed the manifesto, which was presented to the President during their meeting."

I challenge Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez to initiate the proper criminal proceedings.

—BONIFACIO A. ALENTAJAN,
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The second coming of conjugal plunder

NEVER IN PHILIPPINE HISTORY HAVE we seen power so much abused and corruption so brazenly committed by people in power as they are today by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo (except probably by the conjugal dictatorship during martial law).

The two are wielding state power to satisfy their whims and caprices, as if they are above the law. Consider all these multimillion-peso irregularities committed under this regime of plunder:

1. The $14-million kickback in the Impsa deal, which also involved a high-ranking Cabinet official. The deal was uncovered during the early days of the Arroyo administration.
2. The highly irregular construction of the Diosdado Macapagal Boulevard, which has turned out to be the most expensive highway in the country.
3. The P1.3-billion Comelec-Mega Pacific scam.
4. The P2.3-billion fertilizer scam involving former Agriculture Secretary Jocelyn "Joc-joc" Bolante, a known crony of the First Gentleman.
5. The irregular use of PhilHealth and Owwa funds in the 2004 elections.
6. The unexplained, hidden, overseas bank accounts of the Arroyos.
7. And the biggest irregularity of them all, the Hello Garci scandal that bastardized the 2004 elections and robbed the people of their vote.

Add to this the more than 700 political killings since 2001; the blatant disregard of due process just to push Charter change that would ensure the political survival of the Arroyo regime; and the use of underhanded tactics to harass critics, including the use of the libel and rebellion laws as personal weapons against critics of the Arroyos.

It's about time we put an end to this regime of conjugal plunder if we want to end the current political impasse in our country.

—ROEL GARCIA,
spokesperson, Maypagasa,
roelgarcia_772000@yahoo.com

'Compelling evidence' against cops ignored

WE ARE ORDINARY CITIZENS WHO LOST A loved one, Anton L. Cu Unjieng, more than a year ago when he was shot to death by police officers who remain scot-free and have not even been charged to this day.

To us, the evidence is compelling. The shooting spree on Nov. 7, 2005 at the Ortigas Center was recorded live by a media outfit whose office at the time was located just in front of the crime scene. The footage shows, in chilling and graphic detail, a rubout, not a shoot-out. The forensic, physical and other evidence in the case negate the policemen's claims of a legitimate encounter and show their deliberate, wanton and callous disregard for human life.

We were elated when the Commission on Human Rights rendered a decision seven months ago holding 10 members of the Traffic Management Group, Philippine National Police responsible for arbitrary deprivation of life. The CHR forwarded the entire records of the case to the Office of the Ombudsman. Our hopes for a just and speedy resolution of the case, however, have turned into doubts, and our doubts have turned into questions.

We question why, despite the CHR decision, no action has been taken against the TMG men whose names and stations are known and have been verified. We question why the case that the CHR forwarded to the Ombudsman so many months ago has not even, to our knowledge, been assigned a case number. We question why the TMG men are still in the service—free to wreak havoc on the lives of other citizens—despite what we believe to be compelling evidence against them.

We hope we are wrong in raising these questions. But as the mother and grandmother of a young man whose life was arbitrarily and needlessly taken away, we cannot but question why nothing has happened, when the policemen responsible are known and the evidence against them is so compelling. We cannot but ask that the Office of the Ombudsman administer justice to our case.

We join the families of the other victims of human rights violations, not only in commemorating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also in appealing to the government to act with dispatch on our cases. We pray most of all that other families are spared the anguish and suffering of needlessly losing a loved one.

—MONIQUE CU UNJIENG-LA O'
AND CARMENCITA L. CU UNJIENG

Haughty media

I WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU TO RINA Jimenez-David for writing the article "Media and decorum." (PDI, 12/15/06) It was an eye-opener for me. Back in college, nothing of the sort was taught to us in my journalism classes; what was said was to write about the truth, and to make sure our sources and facts are reliable and accurate.

Never was it told to us that press conferences are "exclusive, by-invitation-only" events. And with that, I believe anyone in search of the truth can attend press conferences.

What I gleaned from that incident David talked about in that column was the haughtiness of the media at people who are not from their ranks. Yes, Renato Constantino's outburst was uncalled for, but the heckling he got was, in my point of view, unjust. What is even more infuriating was Victor Agustin's action. There was absolutely no need for him to do that. Constantino was already being ushered out by security, and that should have been enough. And his reason for throwing a glass of water on Constantino's face? What a lame excuse! I write for a magazine and never have felt that press conferences I've been to were "exclusive" events. For that to happen would be belittling the rights of those who may not work for media outfits but who are just as passionate about learning the truth.

I agree that what happened on that day was embarrassing, and perhaps media people should look upon their own selves and think twice whether they are toeing, or even crossing, the very same lines that they claim should never be crossed.

—YAEL ESPERAT,
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Bong Pineda wife's gov bid Palace-backed, says militant

By Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—SEN. MANUEL "LITO" Lapid and his son, Gov. Mark Lapid, should sever ties with President Macapagal-Arroyo and move now to the opposition because the gubernatorial plan of the wife of suspected "jueteng" lord Rodolfo "Bong" Pineda was a ploy to push the senator to run for mayor of Makati Cty, a leader of national fisher folk alliance suggested on Monday.

Fernando Hicap, national chair of the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya), said the fielding of Board Member Lilia "Baby" Pineda showed that "Malacañang's pressure and blackmail politics" were in command.

"It is time for the father-and-son tandem to abandon President Arroyo. They have no choice but to side with the political opposition and the entire Filipino people against her. Breaking away from the ruling political gangland in Malacañang could be a start of true-blue political redemption," Hicap said in a statement here.

Senator Lapid declined an interview on Monday, citing the Christmas holiday and the need to "relax."

But he reiterated loyalty to Ms Arroyo on Dec. 16 when he, as chair of the Lakas-CMD in Pampanga, convened the party here and declared some candidates for the local tickets.

"*Kang Presidente ta pa mu rin* (We are still loyal to the President)," he told reporters.

The convention came a month after 17 of 22 Pampanga mayors broke alliance with the Lapids and moved to the Kabalikat ng Mamamayang Pilipino (Kampi), the President's original political party.

It also came two weeks after Board Member Pineda began holding town-level consultations for her political plans.

Always fielding herself as an independent candidate, Pineda did not say if she was running this time under Kampi.

What is clear at this point is that despite their differences, the Lapids as well as the disgruntled mayors and Board Member Pineda, remained united behind Ms Arroyo whose father, the late President Diosdado Macapagal, was from Pampanga's Lubao town, the hometown of Pineda.

Lapid, who ran in the administration ticket in the May 2004 elections, also declined to state if he was giving the mayoral plan a go, which was supposedly dangled by the Genuino camp in a bid to take the opposition's hold on Makati City where anti-Arroyo rallies had been held. Opposition leaders said it would be "political suicide" for the actor-turned-senator to challenge Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay.

The senator remained quiet as the Department of Interior and Local Government served a suspension notice on Binay over alleged graft and as the latter and his supporters resisted it in November.

Board Member Pineda said her running was prompted by the assessment and clamor of local officials seeking an end to what they called the "poor leadership" of the 27-year-old Governor Lapid.

"*Magmalasakit ku mu para keng lalawigan tamu* (I am only concerned about our province)," said the 55-year-old Pineda.

She herself had been controversial, tagged by jueteng witness Michaelangelo Suze during the August 2005 Senate investigation as the one who handed money to election officials in exchange for their alleged cooperation in rigging the results of the May 2004 elections.

Pineda, through her lawyer, had denied doing that, calling Suze's allegation as "dastardly lies."

Jueteng, or its apparent legal version, the small-town lottery, seemed not to matter as an issue among local officials.

Disagreements broke loose when the Lapids snubbed the resolution of the Pampanga Mayors League to accept last-term mayors in the Lakas-CMD slate for board members, accept non-Lakas mayors into the party and choose Lubao Mayor Dennis Pineda, the board member's son, as the governor's running mate.

Farmers won't accept plan to OK carrot importation

LA TRINIDAD, BENGUET—A CONsultation on disease management of imported Chinese carrots at the Sugar Regulatory Administration building in Quezon City on Wednesday turned out to be a protest forum against the government's import liberalization policy on vegetables.

Benguet and Mt. Province farmers and local officials assailed the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) for allegedly pushing for the immediate approval of the pest risk analysis (PRA) on Chinese carrots which was supposed to be made part of a protocol agreement that would formalize carrot importation.

Jose Andiso Sr., Benguet Federation of Farmers Inc. (BFFI) president, said farmers would not simply sit down and accept the BPI's justification that the risk analysis was part of the government's trade commitments under the World Trade Organization (WTO).

"The WTO reason is simply unacceptable because of the adverse economic impact on local vegetables, not only carrots," he said.

But Lealyn Ramos, BPI acting director, said the PRA is actually a technical measure aimed at preventing the unabated entry of Chinese vegetables since it required the completion of a thorough study of China's export accreditation system and cropping practices.

She admitted though that the BPI only studied the technical aspects of the PRA but not the adverse impact of importation on local vegetable farms.

Mayor Nestor Fongwan, the province's municipal mayors league president, questioned the BPI's imposition of timelines for 10 vegetables which Chinese agricultural officials earlier wanted freed from trade restrictions.

He said the BPI appeared to be fast-tracking the timelines for the vegetables included in the bilateral trade pact between China and the Philippines without considering the possibility of displacing local production.

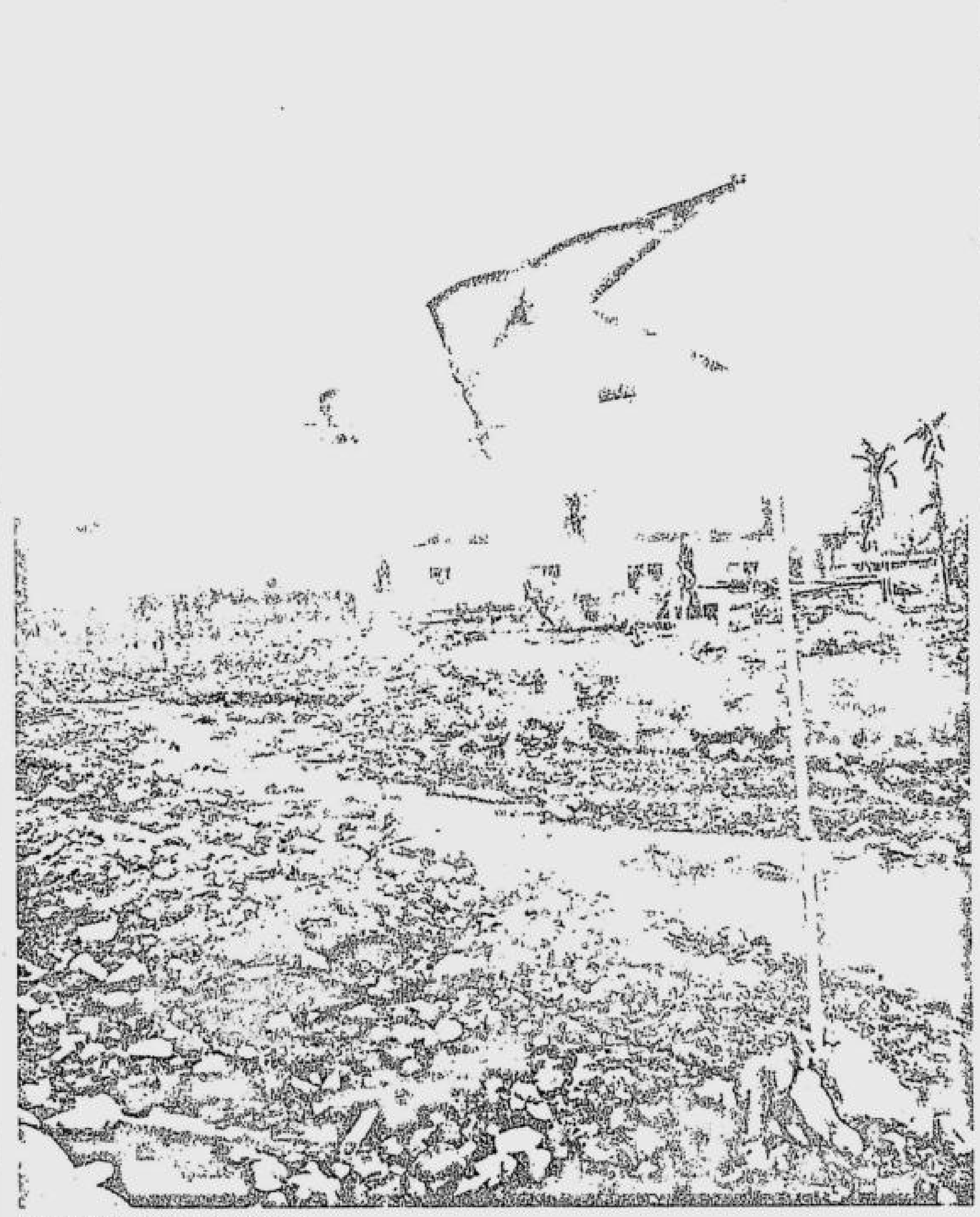
The timelines, or the expected period of completing the PRA, were as follows: carrots, October 2006; potatoes, December 2006; ginger, March 2007; broccoli and cabbage, 2007, lettuce, 2008, lotus root and sweet peas, 2009, and kalian tsai and celery, 2010.

The timelines were agreed upon between Filipino and Chinese officials in March 2006, the BPI said.

The BPI and the Department of Agriculture appeared to have softened as a result of the farmers' protest.

The BPI was forced to shelve the presentation of an administrative order on quarantine conditions for carrot importation after the farmers focused their tirades on the government's policy of adhering to free trade as a WTO member.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap was supposed to issue an order this month declaring that the PRA on carrots has officially been completed. *Delmar Cariño, Inquirer Northern Luzon*



MEMORIAL TO HEROES
A flag stands on the spot where Ethelwaldo Mandane and Julhasan Arasain, soldiers of the Philippine Army, died while trying to save others at the height of mudflows and rock slides in Albay.
JUAN ESCANDOR JR./INQUIRER SOUTHERN LUZON

Sorsogon cop chief says purge behind murders of leftists

SORSOGON CITY—THE POLICE chief of Sorsogon stuck to a military report that the series of killings of leftist militants was the work of leftists themselves in an ongoing purge.

Senior Supt. Joel Regondola, Sorsogon police chief, made the statement following strong criticisms from various militant organizations in Sorsogon that they would never be intimidated by the series of killings that had occurred in the province.

Regondola said these organizations must look within their ranks and not just blame the police for the spate of murders.

"Though we somehow lack personnel ... still the police are effective in securing the vast majority of our people ... These killings are isolated and we are thoroughly investigating these," the police official said.

The militants, on the other hand, said they would never be cowed by the killings as these would only add fuel to the fire in their desire to protect human rights against state repression.

Although many of the known militant leaders in the province have slowed down in their activities they said they were merely assessing the situation.

Senior Insp. Jigo Lopez, Donsol municipal police chief, said they had already obtained the statement of one of the three individuals who was with Francisco Bantog when he was shot to death by three assailants.

Bantog was the municipal chair in Donsol and provincial auditor of Bayan Muna.

He was the 41st victim of extrajudicial killings in the province.

Lopez said police have yet to locate the two other witnesses who were believed to have gone into hiding for fear of their lives.

The municipal police chief said he already had an initial talk with the wife and other relatives of the victim but nothing substantial had come out of it as the family was still in deep grief.

Lopez said they were treating the case just like an ordinary murder case, saying he never knew that Bantog was a leader of the Bayan Muna as the victim had never mentioned it although he frequently went to his office for various tourism activities.

He said they would also look into personal and political angles in the killing after being informed that Bantog was a staunch political leader of Donsol's incumbent mayor. *Bobby Q. Labalan, Inquirer Southern Luzon*

Lahar still threatens Central Luzon

By Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—THE threat of lahar (volcanic mudflows) still hangs over three Central Luzon provinces around Mt. Pinatubo, and it is best for residents to exercise vigilance for their safety, especially during prolonged rains, the country's chief volcanologist advised on Thursday.

The degree of lahar threats is "relatively lower" on the volcano's eastern side where Pampanga and Tarlac are located, but "high" on the western side where Zambales is, said Dr. Renato Solidum, director of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs).

Saying that the lahar problem around Mt. Pinatubo was not completely over, Solidum said in a phone interview that less than half of the more than 6 cubic kilometers of pyroclastic materials the volcano spewed out during its June 1991 eruptions are still on the slopes.

The rest had been washed down to eight main drainage systems namely in the rivers Pasig-Potrero, Abacan, Porac-Gumain in Pampanga, Sacobia-Bamban and O' Donnel in Tarlac, and Sto. Tomas, Bucao and Maloma in Zambales.

"For Pinatubo, the estimate of potential 1991 pyroclastic flow deposit is 3.5 cubic km. The estimated remobilized materials are 3 cubic km," Solidum later said in a text message.

That means that lahar could come from two sources: From the slopes or from rivers.

Describing the extent of lahar deposits on the Zambales side, he said: "*Marami pa rin* (There are still many)."

And rivers there are now "elevated," meaning choked with debris.

"A possible scenario (in Zambales) is that remobilized lahar could escape from rivers," Solidum said.

Monitoring by geologist Dr. Kelvin Rodolfo in Zambales in August this year showed that lahar washed down by rains of Typhoons "Florita" and "Glenda" and Tropical Storm "Henry" clogged the Macolcol Bridge, forcing the debris and floodwaters from the Sto. Tomas River to flow toward San Narciso town instead of heading straight out to the South China Sea.

The Department of Public Works and Highways created a temporary channel in Barangay La Paz to divert the lahar and water away from the town.

Three sections spanning 700 meters at the Macolcol-Vega Dike had been damaged and plugged with sandbags to protect Barangay Namatacan.

The last major lahar flows, as deep as 20 meters, were recorded along the Bucao River in Botolan, Zambales, in 2000, according to Rodolfo.

On the eastern side, Solidum said current field assessments by Phivolcs showed that lahar remained confined within the channels of the 56-km FVR Megadike ringing the Pasig-Potrero River in Bacolor, Pampanga.

But that situation or having a lahar-catching structure should be no reason for residents in Pampanga, especially those in Bacolor and the capital city of San Fernando, to be complacent.

"The communities will have to monitor the (integrity) of the dike," he advised.

Government had spent P3.3 billion to build the dike, DPWH reports showed. The Save San Fernando Movement and the Save Pampanga Movement have kept guard, doing structural assessments before and during typhoon events, according to Marni Castro, an engineer working with those civic groups.

"In events of extreme rainfall, you don't know what will happen so there's a need for people and local governments to monitor the situation," Solidum said.

Phivolcs had declared 10 km around Mt. Pinatubo a permanent danger zone. It has posted on its website the lahar hazard maps for four major rivers.

RP gov't seeks Japan PM help for Mindanao peace

By Michael Lim Ubac

THE ARROYO ADMINISTRATION is asking a former Japanese prime minister to help bring peace in Mindanao through a multinational economic development effort.

"A strong Japanese economic effort is vital in the Mindanao peace drive," said Speaker Jose de Venecia who reported that he had asked Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to request either one of his two predecessors—Yoshiro Mori or Junichiro Koizumi—to head the initiative.

De Venecia said that should either one accept the offer, he would join "international heavyweights" being mobilized for the administration's Mindanao peace offensive. They include Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah, Libyan President Qaddafi and US President George W. Bush.

He said that the leaders would map out a program that would "bring about a final peace agreement backed by serious economic mobilization packages for Mindanao."

The Philippine government asked for either Mori or Koizumi to lead the Japanese effort in Mindanao during De Venecia's meeting in Manila two weeks ago with Abe, Japan's youngest post-war prime minister who had come for the Southeast Asian summit in Cebu which was cancelled because of an approaching typhoon.

"The new Premier said he would talk to both leaders to secure their participation," de Venecia said.

Credible incentive

According to Venecia, the major economic packages were important to sustain the peace drive and forge a final peace agreement with the remaining secessionist movement, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

He said the multinational initiative for peace and development in Mindanao was the "strongest and most credible incentive for the MILF to move towards the final stage and sign a long-delayed peace agreement with the national government in early 2007."

Former president Fidel Ramos, along with De Venecia, helped negotiate the successful 1996 Peace Agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front led by Chair Nur Misuari.

Higher rice yield for Eastern Visayas this year

SLOW RECOVERY
THIS BOY from Guiwanon island in Barangay Cabalagnan, Nueva Valencia, Guimaras helps repair a fishing net to be used when his father goes back to the sea. The villagers are slowly recovering from the ill-effects of the oil spill last August. Around 200 sacks of bunker fuel debris are still in the island. The debris were discovered by residents two months after Petron left the island for the cash for work program in Guimaras. ARNOLD ALMACEN / INQUIRER VISAYAS

By Joey A. Gabieta
Inquirer Visayas

TACLOBAN CITY—THE DEPARTMENT of Agriculture in Eastern Visayas has reported that the region's rice production overshot the projected 2006 target by over six percent.

This would make the region self-sufficient on rice needs for its over three million population, according to DA-8 executive director Leo Cañeda.

The increase in rice production was "astounding" considering that Eastern Visayas has been hit by typhoons this year, the latest of which was "Seniang," which destroyed about 24,400 metric tons of rice, he said.

"The increase of rice production in the region could be attributed to our massive promotion of hybrid rice seeds, which resulted to high yield," Cañeda said.

With just a week before the year ends, the region's rice farmers have now produced about 842,000 MT, which is 6.7 percent higher compared to the projected 800,000 MT, Cañeda said.

Last year, the region's more than 400,000 rice farmers produced 789,000 MT of rice.

"We are happy about this development—that we're able to surpass our rice yield despite the typhoons," Cañeda said.

Eastern Visayas, which comprises Leyte, Southern Leyte, Biliran, Samar, Eastern Samar and Northern Samar provinces, was hit this year by typhoons "Caloy," "Milenyo" and "Seniang."

Except for Northern Samar, all the provinces in the region posted an increase in rice yield, Cañeda said.

He said Leyte farmers increased their production from the previous year's 88 cavans per hectare to 94 cavans per ha this year.

In Southern Leyte, rice yield rose to 94 cavans per ha, up from the previous 92 cavans per ha, he said.

Yield from Biliran increased from 84 to 94 cavans per ha; Eastern Samar, from 48 to 50 cavans per ha; Samar, from 34 to 39 cavans per ha.

Northern Samar farmers had the same rice harvest as last year, at 42 cavans per ha.

Cañeda said the increase in harvest resulted from their campaign on the use of hybrid rice, which yields between 130 to 200 cavans per hectare.

Farmers using the regular type of rice seeds result in a harvest of 60 to 80 cavans per ha.

With the increased production, Cañeda said about 100,000 MT of rice could be exported to other parts of the country.

He said 10 percent of the region's rice yields are sold to Central Visayas.

Last year, the region exported 40,000 MT of rice to different parts of the country. Eastern Visayas has an annual rice consumption of 430,000 MT.

Ormoc now a favorite destination of Korean tourists

By Vicente S. Labro
Inquirer Visayas

ORMOC CITY—KOREAN TOURISTS are slowly making this city by the bay as one of their favorite destinations in the country.

Mayor Eric Codilla said Korean tourists started coming into his city about three years ago, mainly to play golf.

He said a Korean company was able to lease the existing Leyte Golf and Country Club for a period of time and when this became operational under the new management, tourists from Korea started to trickle into the city.

The 18-hole golf course is located about 7 km from the city proper. It overlooks Ormoc Bay and covers more than 80 hectares of semi-rolling terrain. The Leyte Golf and Country Club also offers accommodation facilities, a swimming pool and a restaurant.

The Korean tourists used to arrive here by chartered flights from Manila to this city's airport, but now they come via Cebu through its international airport and travel to Ormoc via fast craft, he said.

Codilla said about two to three batches of Koreans arrive in Ormoc every month, with each batch composed of 20 to 30 people and they stay in the city for about two weeks.

The mayor said the city also boasts of its many good hotels for tourists and the many other places where tourists would love to go.

The city, which is the center of commerce and industry on the western side of Leyte Island, is home to the world's largest wet steam producing geothermal field.

Other places of interest are the Lake Danao Natural Park, Lake Kasudsuran and Lake Janagdan, the plantation of the famous Queen Pineapple, and the white beaches.

In the city proper alone, tourists can visit the centuries old Saints Peter and Paul Church, the city's oldest bridge called Puente de la Reina, the Philippine-Japan Peace Memorial, and the Veterans Park.

Court says PTA has no more claim over Marcos bust, park

BAGUIO CITY—THE PHILIPPINE Tourism Authority has no more claim over the park that hosts the damaged bust of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos, the Court of Appeals ruled last month.

Affirming a decision penned by the late Judge Nelsonida Ulat-Marrero, the appellate court's 14th division said tourism officials forcibly displaced Ibaloi families from their farms on Sept. 4, 1976, before they built the Marcos Park.

In her April 23, 2000 decision, Marrero voided the sales contract between Ibaloi farmer Samuel "Ino" Kinomis, part owner of the lot where the damaged bust still stands, and former Baguio Mayor Bernardo Vergara, who was PTA general manager during the Marcos administration.

The court also established that PTA officials at that time, as well as some members of the military, "acted in bad faith and oppressed" the Ibalois by forcing them to sell their lands.

Kinomis and his neighbors testified that soldiers grabbed their hands and forced them to affix their thumbprints on documents that legitimized the sale.

The Kinomis family took over the PTA property after Marcos' ouster in 1986 and went to court to nullify the sale. Segments of the property had been converted into a community high school.

In 2002, a bomb planted by communist rebels destroyed the bust's face.

The PTA had appealed Marrero's decision before the CA, saying it was not responsible for the soldiers who abused Kinomis and his neighbors.

But Associate Justice Fernanda Lampas-Peralta, who penned the decision on Nov. 30, said PTA's claim was "simply implausible."

"As the trial court correctly found... Kinomis could not have intelligently and voluntarily executed and signed the deed of absolute sale," Peralta said.

"The deed of absolute sale was written entirely in English and could not possibly be understood by Kinomis, an illiterate who could not even write his name," she said.

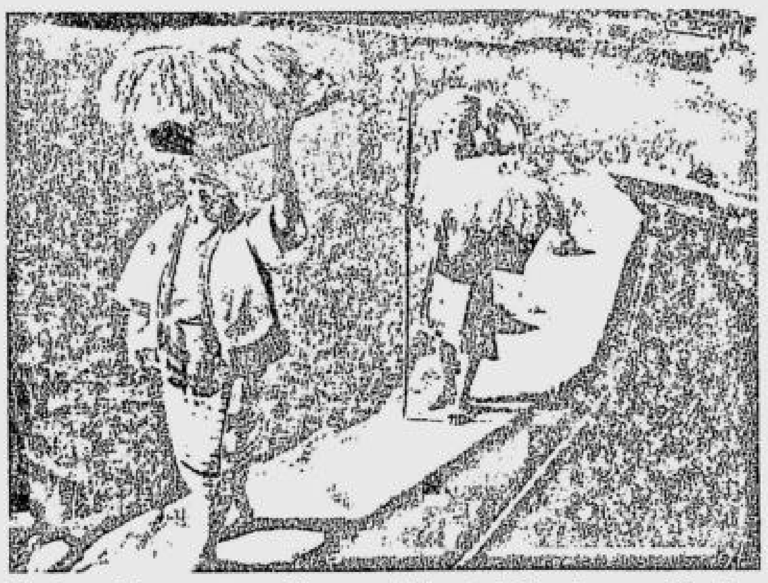
The court also cited procedural violations that the PTA committed when it transacted with an Ibaloi. During that period, legal arrangements with so-called national minorities required the intervention of the Presidential Assistant on National Minorities (Panamin), Peralta said.

"It's simply implausible that [PTA] was unaware of the wrongful acts of its representatives and the military in driving away [Kinomis] from the Asinan property when it was [PTA] which immediately utilized the property by constructing a golf course, tennis court, clubhouse and a restaurant thereon," she said. *Vincent Cabreza, Inquirer Northern Luzon*

Political posters, stickers and streamers turned by artists are wrapped around the damaged concrete bust of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos in Tuba, Benguet. TOOTS SOBERANO/NORTHERN LUZON BUREAU

Fund lack hampers bid to restore Ifugao terraces

By Delmar Cariño
Inquirer Northern Luzon



The famed rice terraces of Ifugao and Mountain Province need funds to be rehabilitated. Some of them have been eroded or abandoned.
EV ESPIRITU / INQUIRER NORTHERN LUZON

LAGAWE, IFUGAO—PROVINCIAL officials have stepped up efforts to rehabilitate the Ifugao rice terraces in a bid to finally remove their inclusion from the list of endangered heritage sites in the world.

But Gov. Glenn Prudenciano said fund lack had greatly contributed to the difficulty of the province to comply with the standards of restoration set by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco).

A monitoring team sent in April by Unesco's World Heritage Center and the International Union for Conservation of Nature to inspect the rice terraces welcomed the efforts of local officials to restore the irrigation system of the terraces, he said.

But the team "noted with concern" that little progress was made to implement the recommendation of two teams that visited the terraces in September 2001 and June 2005 that called for the preparation of a comprehensive conservation and management plan for the terraces.

The teams also asked for the allocation of steady funds to address the challenges, to be drawn from the conservation plan.

Unesco said the "corrective" measures on the rice terraces must be ready by the end of 2007 as a condition for the removal of the terraces from the list of endangered world heritage sites.

"We had been doing our best to implement the corrective measures by way of focusing the funds only for the repair of rice terraces that are included in the heritage list," Prudenciano said.

The last release from the P50 million given by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCAA) for the terraces' restoration will now be concentrated on the irrigation and restoration of the terraces in four towns, he said.

These are Banaue (Batad and Bangaan rice terraces cluster), Mayoyao (Mayoyao central rice terraces), Kiangan (Nagacadan rice terraces cluster) and the Hungduan-Hapao rice terraces cluster.

Unesco earlier included these terraces in the endangered list after its inspection teams found out that the terraces have deteriorated due to uncontrolled construction of houses, erosion induced by climate and abandonment of the terraces by the farmers.

Unesco also noted that the terraces have started to decay due to the rapid depletion of their watershed cover.

To solve the problem, the international agency wanted a reforestation program to be launched for the planting of endemic tree species to protect the watershed system of the rice terraces.

Prudenciano said Malacañang's abolition of two agencies formed to supervise the repair of the terraces, the Ifugao Terraces Commission (ITC) and the Banaue Rice Terraces Task Force (BRTTF), created a gap that left the local government isolated from national government support.

The provincial board formed in July this year the Ifugao Cultural Heritage Office (ICHO) to oversee and document the progress of the rice terraces' rehabilitation.

Glenda Dumangeng of the ICHO said meager funds were allocated from the province's development fund to finance the stonewalling of the rice paddies.

She said 40 terraces were restored at Batad at the cost of P300,000 while P450,000 was spent for the Mayoyao and Bangaan rice terraces this year.

An additional P300,000 was also allotted from next year's budget, she said.

Cebu sees more earnings from reclaimed area

By Irene R. Sino Cruz
Inquirer Visayas

CEBU CITY—THE CITY GOVERNMENT will start earning from the reclaimed South Road Properties (SRP) next year as some investors were expected to start constructing their facilities, Cebu Investment Promotion Center Joel Mari Yu said.

"I would like to believe that in the first half of next year we will see actual structures coming up," Yu said.

He said negotiations with some investors were in the final stages so the city government was expected generate revenues from the property.

University of Cebu president Augusto Go planned to build a high-end trade high school on a two-hectare lot across the school's campus, Yu said.

The Cebu City government and Go were negotiating for the lease of the area with an option to purchase, he added.

Another investor, Bigfoot wanted to start soon the construction of sound stages and a marina-commercial complex.

The company requires 15 hectares for the sound stage project and another two hectares for the marina-commercial complex.

Yu said Bigfoot planned to purchase outright the two hectares and lease, with an option to buy, the 15 hectares.

Bigfoot also planned to build a 15-story condominium also on the two-hectare area, he said.

"The sound stages project is also their (Bigfoot's) immediate priority. They want to build four sound stages as fast as possible," Yu added.

The Cebu City government also planned to go into joint venture projects with two major real estate developers.

The city was also finalizing an agreement with the Cardiovascular Hospitals of America, which planned to set up a medical facility at the SRP, he said.

There are also pending negotiations for 12 hectares with Taiwanese businessman Paul Yu, who was awaiting the completion of the access road, Yu said.

"Upon completion of the road, not only will Paul Yu come in but two or three other investors who want to come in and put up a standard factory building within that area," he pointed out.

Yu also explained that the bulk of the city's earnings generated from the SRP would come from its share of the utility sales, such as power and water.

"Land leases would only account for not more than 35 percent (of the SRP revenues). More than 50 percent of the revenue will come from our shares of power shares and the balance from our share of the water sales and other utility sales," Yu said.

36 hurt in Christmas revelry in C. Visayas

CEBU CITY—TWO PERSONS were hit by stray bullets in Cebu, while 34 other were injured by different types of firecrackers during the Christmas revelry in Central Visayas, authorities said.

Records of the Regional Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit (Resu) of the Department of Health (DOH-7) based in Cebu City show that the two victims of stray bullets were Janice Aleonar, 29, of Carcar, Cebu; and Rolando Obeso, 32 of Lawaan, Talisay City.

Aleonar was hit by a stray bullet from an unknown caliber at exactly 12 midnight yesterday. She was injured in the neck but was recuperating at the Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center (VSMMC) in Cebu City.

Obeso was at his backyard at 1:20 a.m. yesterday when he felt pain in the chest that later turned out to be a stray bullet, according to Resu-7 Rennan Cimafranca.

Obeso was brought to the Talisay District Hospital and was transferred to VSMMC for treatment.

Meanwhile, 34 persons were also brought to different hospitals in the Region because of firecracker blasts.

Cimafranca said 32 of them came from at least seven hospitals in Metro Cebu, while one was brought to the Governor Celestino Gallares Hospital in Tagbilaran City in Bohol and another one at the Negros Oriental provincial Hospital in Dumaguete City.

Cimafranca said the victims' ages ranged from 8 to 34 years old. Many of them suffered hand injuries and some were hit in the eyes. There were no serious injuries, he said.

The figure was slightly lower compared to the 42 victims recorded in the region during last year's Christmas celebration but it could go higher once the other hospitals submit their reports, Cimafranca said.

Cimafranca also noted that the victim of stray bullet last year happened during the New Year revelry and not on Christmas eve.

In contrast, peace reigned in other parts of the Visayas and it was a news that pleasantly surprised police authorities and doctors on Christmas eve duty in Negros Occidental, Samar and Leyte provinces: No blast victim.

People were apparently too hard up or could barely get through the Christmas holiday that they would rather spend their money on food, toys and clothes than on firecrackers and pyrotechnics, police and health officials said in Eastern and Western Visayas said.

One blast victim was reported in Iloilo, 3-year-old Jesel Crisostomo, who lost three fingers on his right hand after a firecracker exploded in his hand while his family was celebrating Christmas eve at their residence in Balasan town.

Senior Supt. Ronilo Quebrar, the chief of the Bacolod City police, said the only untoward incident reported in the city was the arrest to Ryan Virata, 31, for illegal possession of a firearm, grave threats and illegal discharge of .45 caliber revolver at Purok Lubi, Barangay 3, Bacolod City at 1:30 a.m. No one was hurt, he added. *Jhunnex Napallacan, Carla Gomez, Nestor Burgos Jr., Jani Arnaiz, Chito Fuentes and Joey Gabieta, Inquirer Visayas*

Kids 'solicit' for food, games

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
Inquirer Southern Luzon

Street children roam Lucena City soliciting coins from strangers.
DELFIN MALLARI JR.

LUCENA CITY—"*MAGANDANG Pasko po! Parang tulong lang po* (Merry Christmas! Just a little help, please)," is the popular holiday greetings of kids here as they persuade strangers to give them coins as Christmas gift.

For some, the plea could just be a con-lingo of a smart street kid. But for others, it's a mirror of the hard life they are facing.

"My younger brother and I have been taking the opportunity this Christmas season to earn money so that we can help our parents. When December starts, we are able to eat three meals a day because of our earnings from the generosity of the people. Most of them are kind during this time," Jonathan Aldarico, 11, a Grade 5 student in a local public elementary school, told the INQUIRER in Filipino.

He said his father used to be a construction worker but was now sick. Their mother does the neighbors' laundry to earn money.

Jonathan said they had been soliciting Christmas gifts for the past three weeks.

But he made it clear that they were not beggars.

"We're only asking for some money because it's Christmas. After this, we will stop," Jonathan said.

However, he complained that the intermittent rains had affected their Christmas solicitation.

"It was raining at night so we did not earn much from caroling," he lamented.

Anita Teode, a widower in her late 30s, admitted that she had been dispatching her three young children to the streets to ask money from strangers in the spirit of Christmas.

"I have no regular job except for selling few vegetables in the neighborhood. I could barely feed them. Since people tend to be generous during Christmas, we might as well grab the opportunity to earn easy money," Teode said.

She said that with her kids' earnings, she was able to buy food and second hand clothes and fix their leaking roof.

"They have already earned more than P2,000 since the start of December. Hopefully, they could earn some more so that we can have a Happy New Year. *Pancit* (noodles) and bread are enough," Teode said.

Yesterday, she and her children dressed up in tattered clothes and were together in asking Christmas gifts from church goers.

But if Christmas season for Jonathan and Anita was an opportunity to ease their economic hardship, some children also grab the occasion to make quick money.

They even dressed themselves up like street kids to attract pity from their prospects.

He admitted that his mother is a teacher in a private school.

His gang of four boys, all in their elementary ages, gleefully counted the collected coins inside their soda cans.

They planned to enjoy their money by playing computer games in an Internet shop in one of the malls.

Negros Or. cops, soldiers on red alert

By Alex Pal
Inquirer Visayas

DUMAGUETE CITY—THE POLICE and military in Negros Oriental will remain on red alert for the duration of the Christmas season because of expected hostilities from communist guerrillas.

"We expect and are prepared for insurgency-related activities," said Negros Oriental police director Senior Supt. Melvin Ramon Buenafe, "especially because December 26 is the founding anniversary of the Communist Party of the Philippines."

The CPP usually directs the New People's Army to conduct offensives against troops. So far, there hasn't been any change in their statement, Buenafe said.

The police official, however, clarified that there was still no actual threat to the peace and order situation in Negros Oriental but they are not letting their guard down.

He said police and military camps in the province have already undertaken the necessary precautions.

The President last Thursday had approved a 4-day unilateral ceasefire—from 12:01 a.m. on Dec. 24 to midnight of Dec. 25, and from 12:01 a.m. on Dec. 31 to midnight of Jan. 1, 2007—but Buenafe said that is only as far as the military and police are concerned. "It does not bind the CPP."

Policemen who was not able to celebrate Christmas with their families may be allowed to be with their families for the New Year. "But those who are allowed to go home to be with their families will be called to duty any time a need arises," Buenafe said.

Negros Occidental Gov. Joseph Marañon and Bacolod Bishop Vicente Navarra called on both the government and rebel forces to ensure that peace reigned in the country as Filipinos celebrated the birth of Christ.

Navarra appealed to all forces to respect the truce. *With a report from Carla Gomez, Inquirer Visayas*

Jerry Velasco of Molo district in Iloilo City replicated a bazooka from Cavite, which is made of PVC pipe, and sells the New Year noisemaker for P300 each.
ARNOLD ALMACEN / INQUIRER VISAYAS

'Bazooka' hot-selling noisemaker

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
Inquirer Southern Luzon

LUCENA CITY—A RETIRED band member in this city has fashioned a cannon out of a PVC (polyvinyl chloride) pipe, turning it into a hot-selling noisemaker to welcome the New Year.

John Almario, 37, got the idea from the "*boga*" cannon invented by the Caviteños.

He bought a red PVC "bazooka" in Cavite last year, tinkered with its parts and mechanisms, added some innovations and came up with his own design.

He now has a booming business selling the cannons in a makeshift stall along the main road of the Market View Village here.

"I knew I could make money from it," Almario told the INQUIRER.

Two years ago, the "boga" cannon was very popular because it was a safe, cheaper and more effective noisemaker.

Like the cannon invented by the Caviteños, Almario uses PVC pipes and fittings as the main materials.

Unlike the original cannon which uses a disposable cigarette lighter, Almario uses a gas stove igniter, that could be activated with the click of a triggering mechanism. This sets off a loud explosion from the combustion of squirts of methyl alcohol at the tail end of the pipe.

Almario showed the INQUIRER a modern version of the traditional bamboo cannon made of a double barrel, size-4 PVC pipe which he sells for P1,200 apiece.

He said his invention could "produce a loud boom which could surpass the bang of Bulacan firecrackers."

Almario squirted a few drops of methyl alcohol on the back chamber and after shaking the tube a bit to create a vapor, he pulled the trigger.

The resulting blast was deafening, prompting some motorists to stop and inquire about Almario's bazooka-like cannon.

A youngster was overheard trying to convince his father to buy him a smaller version of the cannon which cost P600.

"Word spreads fast about the quality and the loud bang produced by my cannons," Almario said. "I have orders coming from neighboring towns so we have to work double time to beat the New Year deadline."

One of his workers was seen spraying paint on a finished cannon, making it look like the real McCoy.

Almario maintains a small working area at the back of his house where he and some of his hired hands assemble the noise device.

"Putting each cannon together requires meticulous attention. I always make sure that my products are safe to use by New Year revelers, unlike the traditional and often dangerous firecrackers," he said.

However, he would still advice buyers to take extra precaution when they fire the cannons.

"The user should make sure that the chamber is tightly sealed before pulling the trigger or it may backfire and cause injury to others," Almario said.

1 killed in NPA attack 8 hours after ceasefire

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
Inquirer Southern Luzon

LUCENA CITY—EIGHT HOURS after the start of the government-initiated unilateral ceasefire against communist insurgents, an undetermined number of New People's Army rebels attacked a detachment manned by armed government militia men in Batangas Sunday morning, leaving one civilian dead and another one wounded.

Major Ramon Rosario, commander of the Armed Forces' Civil Relations Service in Southern Luzon, which is based in Camp Nakar here, said the rebels, using civilians as cover, attacked the detachment of the Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit (Cafgu) stationed at the coastal village of San Diego in Lian town at around 8:50 a.m.

Firefight

Quoting an initial report from the field, Rosario said the firefight between militiamen and communist rebels lasted about 15 minutes.

"The enemies did not even consider the safety of the civilians, especially during this sacred season for the Filipinos. They used innocent people as cover in their attack," Rosario said.

He said the rebels could have also suffered an undetermined number of casualties and injured fighters based on the heavy traces of blood along the escape routes.

The military has declared a four-day suspension of offensive operations against communist rebels in observance of the Yuletide season that took effect midnight of Dec. 24 and ended midnight of Dec. 25, and on Dec. 31 to Jan. 1.

But the Communist Party of the Philippines rejected the truce declaration.

Communist spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal said the government declaration of a four-day "suspension of offensive military operations" (Somo) is "clearly deceptive, utterly worthless and is in fact merely aimed at covering up attacks against the people."

"The CPP and NPA see no reason to reciprocate the Malacañang-AFP tandem's fake declaration and have no basis for declaring a ceasefire during this period. In fact, there is utmost need to further intensify people's war," Rosal said in a statement released Saturday.

He cited the "unprecedented state violence and terrorism against the people in the name of the all-out war declared by the Arroyo regime" as one of the grounds of their rejections of the ceasefire initiated by the Macapagal-Arroyo administration.

The CPP also criticized Malacañang's maneuvers to change the Constitution to cancel the scheduled 2007 elections, thus, extending Arroyo's rule, as another reason for their refusal to declare a similar cessation of armed hostilities.

"Such Somo declarations by Malacañang and the AFP have time and again been proven to be instruments to treacherously attack NPA units and their mass base. The AFP has likewise exploited the CPP's own ceasefire declarations to launch attacks against the revolutionary forces and mass base," Rosal said.

To prepare for the upcoming celebration of the CPP's 38th founding anniversary today, the communist leadership called on all NPA units to further intensify offensives.

Surrender

In Davao del Sur, at least 113 residents of Barangay Managa in Bansalan withdrew their support to the New People's Army (NPA) and pledged to back-up government efforts against the communists.

Lt. Bruce Tokong, spokesperson of the Army's 39th Infantry Battalion, said the surrender was an offshoot of an intensified civil-military campaign against the NPA. "We launched the 'Barangayan 2006' program, which we have proven to be effective in our drive against insurgency in far flung villages," Tokong said.

Under the program, soldiers try to fill the gap in basic government services including health services. *With a report from Eldie S. Aguirre, Inquirer Mindanao*

Ousted exec, 49 others forcibly enter water facility offices

By Joey A. Gabieta
Inquirer Visayas

TACLOBAN CITY—CLOSE TO 50 persons forcibly entered the offices of the Leyte Metropolitan Water District (LMWD) here on Sunday evening, three hours before Christmas Eve.

The group, led by former Councilor Virgina Flores, held the offices for 15 hours in a move that sought to retake her post as a member of the five-seat board of directors of the water district.

Flores, who was ousted as LMWD board chair in April 2005, and her group, composed of 46 men and two other women, was able to enter the offices of the water utility on Mabini street after one of their three vehicles rammed the main gate.

Flores later told reporters she wanted to force the LMWD management to enforce a Dec. 11 order of the Local Water Utilities Authority to reinstate her in the board.

The three guards, identified as Ramon Sarcillo and one "Amado" and a police officer, PO3 Regis Lonilao, were overpowered by the group, which was able to take control of the offices at 9:15 p.m.

At 12:48 p.m. yesterday, Flores and her group came out from the offices after police informed them that force would be used against them by the city and provincial police forces.

Leyte police director Senior Supt. William Valencia said that with the public interest at stake, the impasse has to be solved immediately, "with all options available" to be used by them.

The LMWD has close to 27,000 member consumers in seven towns and this city.

The offices' power, communication and water connections were cut off during the entire episode.

The water service for the consuming public was not affected.

After the group surrendered, they were brought to the city police station where they remained jailed up to yesterday. It was not yet clear what charges would be filed against the group.

The water district's general manager, former Leyte Vice Governor Nestor Villasin, who presided over an emergency meeting at dawn yesterday to end the impasse, said he was glad that the crisis ended peacefully.

"Thank God its over," was all he said, refusing to issue any statement.

In a radio interview, Flores, who is in her 60s, said she was forced to make the move because the LMWD management ignored the LWUA order reinstating her as member of board of directors.

"There was an order for me to retake my [old] position. When I first visited the office last week to inform them of the decision of the LWUA, they just laughed and ignored me," she told radio station DyDW.

She did not see who laughed at her. She also did not explain why they decided to occupy the LMWD offices on Christmas eve.

Flores said the LWUA ruling, signed by Administrator Lorenzon Jamora, directed the LMWD management to reinstate her to the board. Flores's term in the board was supposed to end by Dec. 31 this year. She has been a member of the board since 1998.

The LWUA ruling said the board's decision to remove her on June 17, 2005 was illegal as it was not approved by the entire directorate, mandated under section 9 of the LMWD by-laws.

Flores was removed from her post when the water facility changed management last year. The general manager and the five board members were appointed by Gov. Jericho Petilla.

Labor chief says 'brain gain' is bright side of OFW exodus

By Leila B. Salaverria

LABOR SECRETARY ARTURO Brion is looking at the bright side of the continuing exodus of Filipino workers, saying it could be a "brain gain" for the country.

Brion has urged businesses and other concerned sectors to work with the government in ensuring that the country would benefit from the global overseas Filipino worker deployment when the OFWs come home.

Brion said the Switzerland-based International Organization for Migration (IOM) had stressed the benefits of the OFW deployment whose number surpassed the one million mark this year.

"The IOM, which considers the Philippines' global migration management system as a model for the world, believes that migrants who have developed and improved their skills abroad can be catalysts of brain gain by transferring and infusing knowledge, skills and technology into their countries of origin," he said in a statement.

Brion said the IOM's recent 92nd session and high level discussion focused on global migration management based on the Philippines' role as the leading source of productive workers for today's world economy.

He added that the event reflected international and local developments in policy and perspective on global migration among OFW hosts amid the pursuit of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals—a program to reduce the number of the world's impoverished peoples.

Development assets

Brion said he and Philippine Business for Social Progress Chair (PBSP) Manuel V. Pangilinan had discussed the possibility of assisting OFWs in becoming assets of development when they return to the country.

"During this discussion, I broached to Mr. Pangilinan, the Chairman of the Board of the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Corporation, the importance of businessmen who can take care of our OFWs, particularly those skilled in science, economics, business and other disciplines, on their return to the Philippines," he said in his speech during the 6th Department of Labor and Employment Research Conference.

Brion also said that Taiwan, a major host country of OFWs, was helping to make brain gain a reality by creating a databank of OFW returnees who have worked for six years in Taiwan.

OVERSEAS Filipino workers from Japan arrive at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport in time for Christmas.

ROGER MARGALLO

The databank would be used to choose employees for the business to be put up by Taiwanese investors at the Clark and Subic special economic zones.

"Taiwan considers the return to the Philippines of OFWs who have worked for six years there—the maximum period allowed by that host country—as its very own loss or brain drain. Their inclusion in this databank upon their return will help to ensure these OFWs' continuing productivity, proving to be a brain gain for both the OFW host and origin economy," Brion said.

Middle east jobs at risk

Also yesterday, the Philippine Association of Agencies for Kuwait (Philaak) said more than 200,000 job orders from the Middle East for Filipino domestics were in danger of being lost following the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration's (POEA) decision to raise the maids' basic pay to US$400.

The association said contracts would have to be renegotiated for those with job offers not only in Kuwait but also those in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia .

Philaak President Thelma Uanang disclosed that her association, composed of 80 agencies that sent 50,000 domestic helpers to Kuwait in the past two years, had written President Macapagal-Arroyo to plead for a six-month deferment of new POEA rules.

Uanang said there has to be a transition period or a staggered implementation of the new policies because these have to be fully explained to foreign employers.

Aside from raising maids' basic pay, POEA also increased the minimum deployment age to 25, scrapped the payment of placement fees, required stricter accreditation of employers, and imposed mandatory government-supervised training and certification for all applicants, she said.

Bombshells

"These were like bombshells that have been dropped on the heads of recruitment agencies," Emmanuel Geslani, a consultant of several Manila-based recruitment firms, told the INQUIRER.

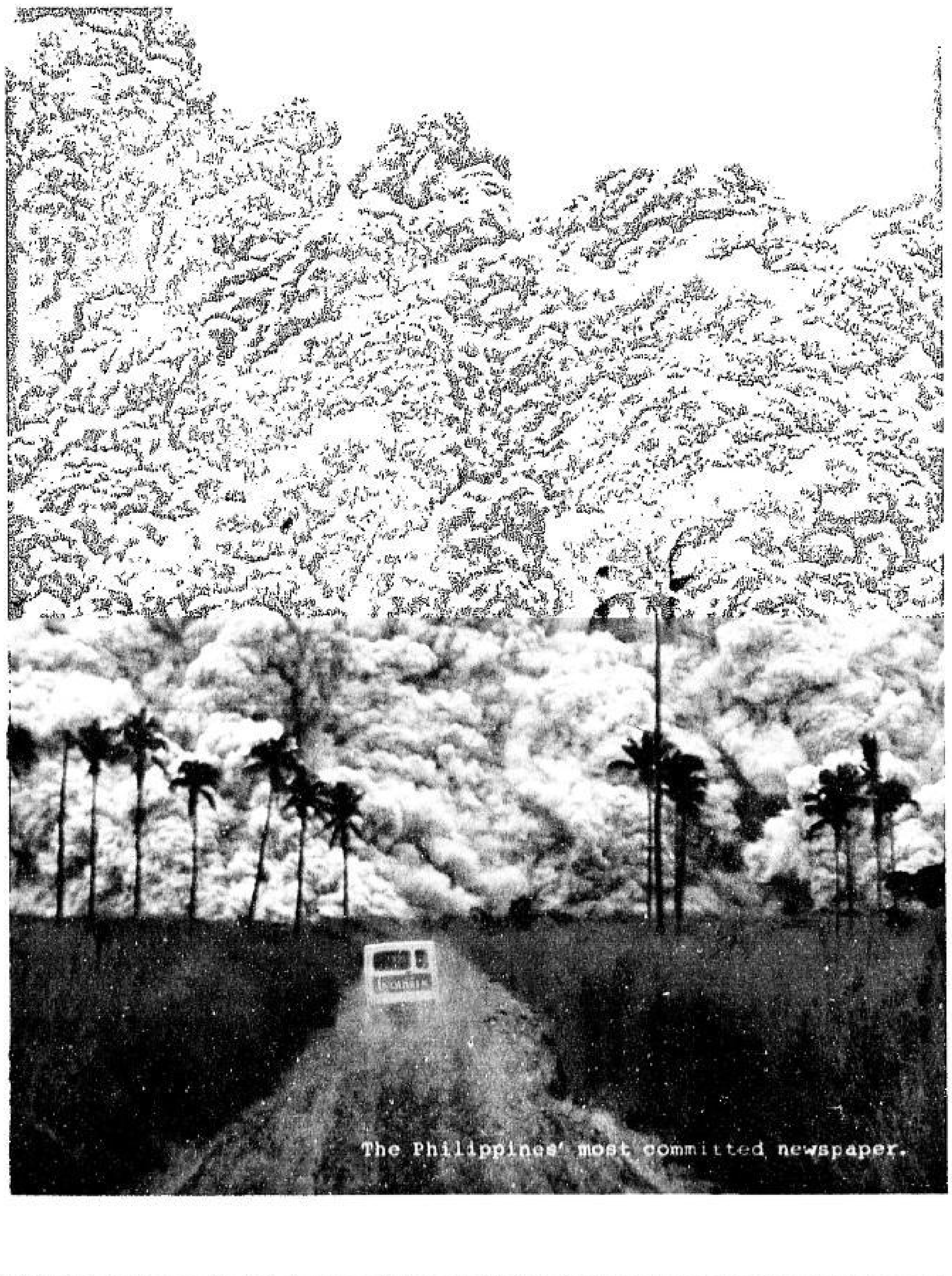
Many agencies whose workers had been processed were caught unaware by the new rules and were prevented from leaving Manila by the POEA offices at the airports, he recounted.

The Khaleej Times, a daily based in Dubai, UAE reported yesterday that employers have started to shy away from hiring Filipina housemaids.

The paper interviewed several UAE-based recruitment agencies that they and their branches or partners in the Middle East have stopped receiving placement orders for Filipina helpers after the new salary scheme was announced.

"Customers have preferred to hire Filipina maids because they are hardworking, clean and dependable. But they believe that US$400 is just too high a price to pay when they can get household helps from other markets at a cheaper," Khaleej Times quoted Siyad al-Zuriqi, one recruiter.

POEA Administrator Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz defended the new set of regulations, saying foreign employers would have to "take it, or leave it." *With a report from Jerome Aning*



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SANTA'S HOUSE
This house along J.P. Rizal Street in Makati City adorned with hundreds of Christmas lights and Santa Claus' entourage of snowmen and reindeer never fails to delight children of all ages. JM GUIAO PUNZALAN

Erap hopes house detention to end soon

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

JAILED FORMER PRESIDENT Joseph Estrada wishes his 101-year-old mother will live longer and his 68-month detention for plunder and other charges will come to an end.

In a brief interview with reporters in his mother's house in Polk Street, North Greenhills, San Juan, Estrada pointed out he had been under detention for five years and eight months now.

The former president spent Christmas Day with his mother Doña Mary yesterday in her house.

"I believe the truth will finally come out this coming New Year. I hope my cases will soon be resolved. I have been waiting for so long," Estrada told reporters.

Saying he wished his mother could live longer, the former president added, "I am looking forward to spending more time with her should I finally be released."

Estrada is under detention in his rest house in Tanay, Rizal for plunder and other charges before the Sandiganbayan.

The deposed leader, who last visited his mother less than two months ago, was again granted a nine-hour furlough to spend Christmas with her.

He is expected to visit her again on New Year's Day, his media officers told reporters.

"I am praying that we will finally get the whole truth about what is happening in our country," Estrada told reporters waiting outside his mother's house yesterday.

He recalled he had been encouraged to leave the country and go on exile to a country of his choice.

But he said he refused the offer, made right after he stepped out of Malacañang in 2001 and was asked to relinquish his post formally .

"That is why they filed charges against me and had me arrested. But I will die first before leaving the country," he said. "My conscience is clear. I am not like Jocjoc Bolante. I am not hiding anything."

Flown by helicopter from Tanay to a helipad in Ortigas Avenue, Estrada arrived in the house about 9 a.m. yesterday, bringing with him *lechon* for his mother. The family also cooked *kare-kare* and *pansit*, favorite dishes of the Estrada matriarch.

Doña Mary quickly recognized her son, and whispered his name twice, leaving Estrada teary-eyed.

Several political allies dropped by and had lunch with the family in the garden at the back of the house.

Fewer politicians showed up yesterday compared to Estrada's last visit, however. Those who came were former Sen. Ernesto Maceda, Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay, Navotas Mayor Toby Tiangco and Sen. Alfredo Lim.

Actor Rudy Fernandez, his wife Lorna Tolentino and their two sons visited Estrada later in the afternoon.

Estrada's wife Sen. Loi Estrada; their son Sen. Jinggoy Estrada; and his son by Guia Gomez, San Juan Mayor JV Ejercito, also joined the Christmas celebration.

Twenty Estrada supporters from Mabalacat, Pampanga tried to visit but were barred by subdivision guards, 43-year-old Catalino Saplala told the INQUIRER.

But Saplala, his wife and two daughters managed to reach the house because he said people in the subdivision had recognized him.

Christmas Day heist in QC

Robbers overpower 12 guards, take off with mall revenues, employees' payroll

By DJ Yap

ARMED ROBBERS WEARING SPECIAL Weapons and Tactics uniforms ran off after midnight yesterday with what could amount to millions of pesos in weekend sales and the employees' payroll of Ever Gotesco mall in Quezon City.

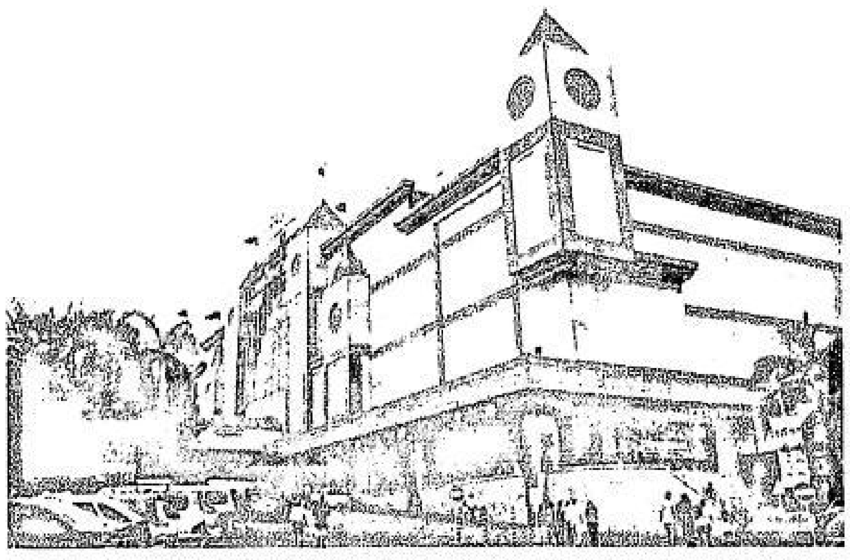
The well-planned Christmas heist happened at past 1 a.m. at the treasury office on the second floor of the mall on Commonwealth Avenue, according to police.

Though Senior Supt. Magtanggol Gatdula, director of the Quezon City Police District, said the owners could not yet determine the amount of cash taken, he said it could run to millions because the robbers made off with sales on Dec. 23-24, as well as the payroll.

About nine men armed with high-powered weapons arrived at the mall aboard a Ford Expedition and Mitsubishi Pajero vehicles and told the guards they were responding to a threat in the building, police said.

Within minutes, all 12 guards around the mall were disarmed and hogtied, said Gatdula.

The suspects then entered the mall by destroying the locks of a gate on the left side of the building. They proceeded to the department store where the treasury was located, Gatdula said.



ROBBERS who broke into the Ever Gotesco mall proved to be well trained for the job, quickly disarming 12 watchmen who provided security for the mall. RAFFY LERMA

He said the robbery could be an inside job as the robbers "knew exactly where to look, and they even knew the combination of the store vaults."

Gardula added the robbers had probably timed the heist on Christmas knowing that the employees received their salaries on the 9th and 25th of every month.

The police official said they would question all the guards and staff members of the treasury office to shed light on the incident. "At the moment, those in the treasury office are considered suspects. We'll also talk to all the guards, even those who were not on duty that night," Gatdula said.

He said investigators were also looking into the possible involvement of robbery gangs in the incident.

Asked if it was possible that police or military elements were involved considering the make of the suspects' weapons, Gatdula said it was too early to speculate, adding that they would pursue all angles in the case.

Las Piñas for armchair tourist

By Jocelyn R. Uy

DISCOVER THE RICH CULTURAL past of Las Piñas City in the comfort of your home.

"Las Pinas: A City of Heritage," a comprehensive hardbound book funded by Sen. Manny Villar and his wife, Rep. Cynthia Villar, was launched recently to help stir among Filipinos interest and cultural pride in the city.

Visitacion de la Torre, one of the authors, said the city "has been shaped by the marriage of faith and romance."

In the book's prologue, she said, "Faith here refers to the kind of spirituality that Fr. Diego Cera made palpable when he spent 37 years of his life improving the town, building the St. Joseph Church and the one-of-a-kind bamboo organ famous the world over ...

"As to romance, it works around the concept of the freedom of the creative spirit to produce a masterpiece, like the bamboo organ, the jeepney, the *parol*, the St. Joseph Church ... this is the romance that empowers the people of Las Piñas to rise beyond poverty, unemployment or mediocrity."

The 220-page book has two parts. The first part tells of the city's beginnings as a nondescript barrio of Parañaque when the Spaniards set foot in Manila in the 16th century and how it labored to achieve its own identity and preserve its culture.

The second part, written by Joyce Crisanto, is an account of the city's transformation from a town into a thriving, urban metropolis "with strong egalitarian and environment leanings."

Graphs, charts, and photographs from ancient structures and old townsfolk to today's modern buildings and leaders contribute to the vivid account of Las Piñas' development.

"It is a colorful book about [unforgettable] characters walking the stage that is called Las Piñas ... one of the top 10 cities in the country and a very historical one. We hope that (the book) would also strengthen and deepen the residents' love for the city," Crisanto told the INQUIRER in an interview.

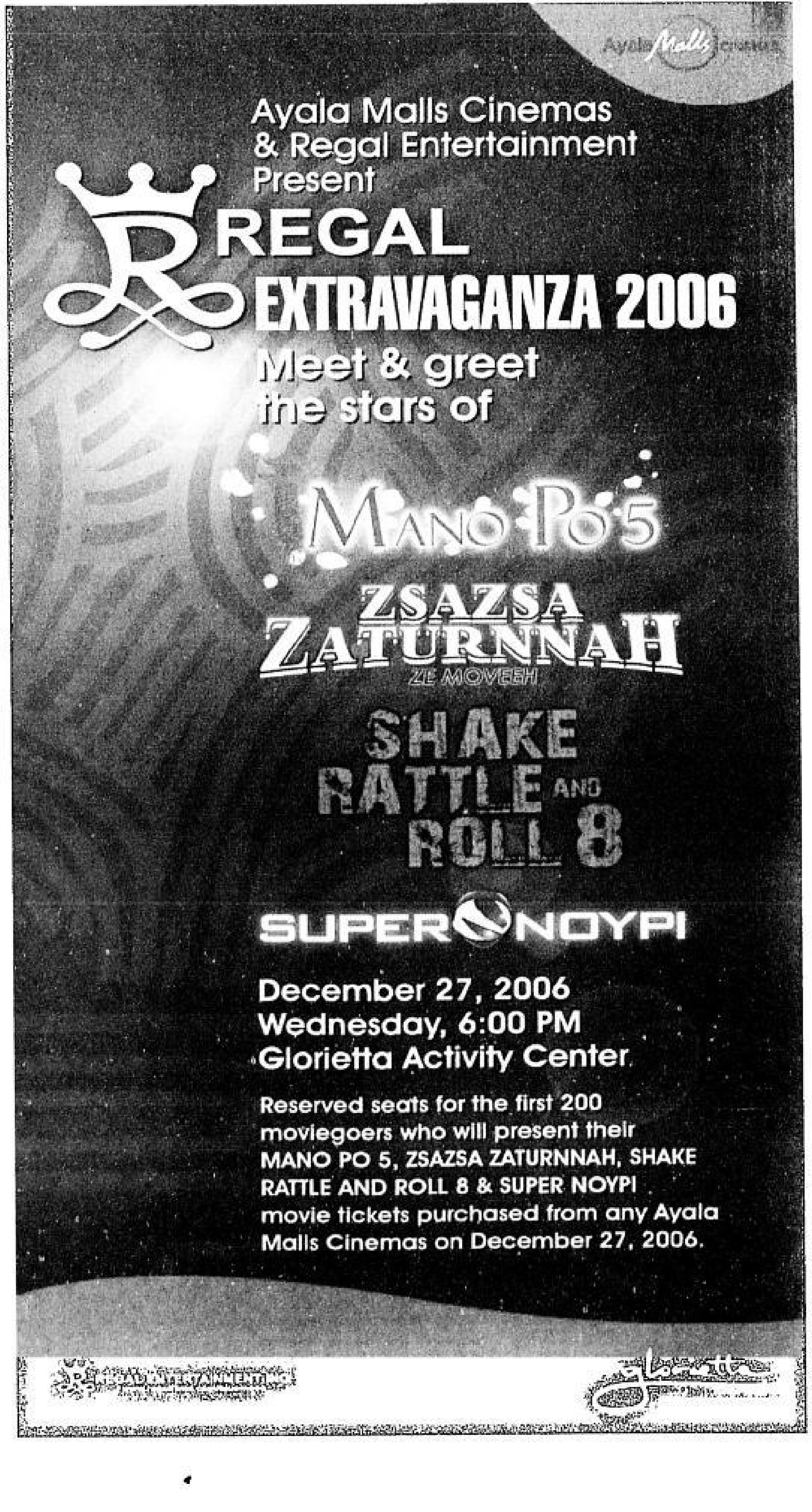
The publication also features the city's little treasures: A few surviving salt beds in an old district; a bamboo museum with 28 of 32 species growing along the Las Piñas River and the *parol* center, which has produced three generations of Christmas lantern makers whose products continue to brighten up many homes in Metro Manila during the holiday season.

Commercial establishments like malls, factories and livelihood centers are also highlighted.

Crisanto hoped that the book—"a handy reference"—would lead to more comprehensive volumes containing residents' personal memories of the city.

"Leafing through the pages of the book is the best way to discover our city," said Las Piñas Rep. Cynthia Villar during the book launching two weeks ago.

The book will be available in bookstores early next year, Crisanto said.



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Another year of waiting in wings for 'Navotas City'

By Nancy C. Carvajal

NAVOTAS HAS GIVEN UP HOPE OF BECOMing a city before the end of 2006 with just a few days left of the current year.

Mayor Toby Tiangco, in a telephone interview, said he was already resigned to the fact that the bill converting the town into a city could not be signed within the few days left before the new year.

The bill was put on hold when its author, Rep. Ricky Sandoval (Malabon-Navotas), sent it back to the House Committee on Rules after he disagreed with some amendments introduced by senators.

Tiangco said they were now racing against time because of the coming elections.

He said it would be difficult to hold a plebiscite when the Commission on Elections (Comelec) was busy preparing for the midterm elections.

Tiangco said that if the bill had not been sent back to the House of Representatives committee, there would have been time to have it passed, signed and submitted for ratification by the people of Navotas through a plebiscite. "It was unduly delayed when it was tossed back to the committee where it stayed for days," he said.

Sandoval said he could not agree to the separation of Navotas and Malabon City during the 2007 elections. He said he would support the proposal if an election for representative of the new district would be held two months after the midterm elections.

"We leave it up to him (Sandoval) to untangle the delay and move for the bill to be signed," Tiangco said. He added that the local government had already allotted P7 million in last year's annual budget for a plebiscite, as required by the Comelec.

The mayor said they were looking forward to a double celebration on Jan. 16 when the town marked its 101th foundation day, but the wish would be unfulfilled.

Tiangco added the town had already met all requirements in terms of income, population, and land area to qualify as a city.

FAMILY DAY

A day in the park was all it took for this family to enjoy Christmas together, without the trimmings of a bountiful table spread, spiffy clothes and brand-new toys. JOAN BONDOC

The teacher who became a secret agent

By Margaux C. Ortiz

IT WAS SIX DAYS BEFORE Christmas. But the holiday spirit was missing last year at the National Bureau of Investigation.

NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco, beloved for his easy charm and management skills, passed away after almost a month of battling a ruptured aneurysm.

Then Assistant Director Nestor Mantaring, designated as officer in charge of the bureau, was as shocked as everyone else when Wycoco's demise was announced.

Though Wycoco was in a deep coma for days before he passed on, Mantaring said his death still came as a shock. "I never thought the director would leave us that soon and in that manner," said the man who would eventually become NBI chief.

As Wycoco's second-in-command, the 59-year-old Mantaring was the logical choice as replacement.

MANTARING RYAN LIM

In fact, several months before Wycoco died, he had instructed Mantaring to take charge of the bureau's day-to-day operations while he (the late NBI chief) dealt with the "political aspect."

"The added responsibility served as training for me," Mantaring said. "I will always be thankful (to Wycoco) for giving me the chance to learn all the things that have helped me become a good leader."

Mantaring was appointed by President Macapagal-Arroyo as acting director following Wycoco's death and, as NBI director in August 2006.

Rising from the ranks, Mantaring has the support and trust of NBI agents and investigators.

Not bad for a former high school teacher who never imagined a career in law enforcement.

"As a young student, I dreamed of becoming an accountant," said Mantaring, who had an aptitude for mathematics.

After finishing his elementary and high school education in Oriental Mindoro, Mantaring obtained a bachelor's degree in education from the Far Eastern University.

He taught for two years at the St. Joseph Academy in his hometown before thinking of changing careers.

"I loved to teach, but I also felt that I needed to pursue further studies," Mantaring recalled.

He thought of studying engineering but wasn't comfortable with the idea of having former students as classmates. "So I decided to take up law instead," Mantaring said, laughing.

At about the same time, he decided to apply as clerk at the NBI to pay for his studies. It was the turning point in his life.

"As a clerk, I was basically on desk duty, taking care of documents," Mantaring said. Eventually, however, agents asked for his assistance in getting the statements of witnesses and suspects.

"I was amazed at how the investigation process was conducted and was impressed with the agents' savvy and confidence," he said.

After four years as a fingerprint aide, records employee, and intelligence officer, Mantaring was appointed agent 1 shortly after passing the bar examinations.

He steadily rose from being a line agent assigned to different units to chief of the NBI Special Task Force, Interpol, Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia) Extension Office, and Dangerous Drugs Division.

Mantaring also became acting regional director of the NBI Central Luzon office and regional director of the Southern Luzon command.

"It has been a long, unforgettable service at the bureau," he said recalling some important cases he took pride in solving.

Among the highlights of his career was the dismantling of the first two methamphetamine hydrochloride (shabu) laboratories discovered in the country.

As executive officer of the bureau's Special Task Force, Mantaring and his team located the first shabu laboratory concealed in the middle of a piggery in San Fernando, Pampanga. Three Chinese chemists were arrested and convicted.

A few years later, as regional director of the Central Luzon office, Mantaring again led in the discovery and dismantling of a second shabu laboratory in Barangay Cutcut, Angeles City.

"All the while, people thought that all shabu supplies were imported by drug traffickers," Mantaring said.

Mantaring was commended in 1991 by former NBI director and now Sen. Alfredo Lim for rescuing real estate magnate Don Antonio Zuzuaregui from his kidnappers. Mantaring's team also recovered part of the P8 million ransom and arrested the suspects.

"An NBI agent's life is really action-packed. It's a good thing my wife, Elizabeth, understands my job," Mantaring said, laughing. The couple have three children.

No to fireworks seizure—NBI

By Margaux C. Ortiz

NATIONAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (NBI) Director Nestor Mantaring has discouraged raids involving the confiscation of firecrackers, citing reasons of safety.

"We have no storage areas built for firecrackers at the bureau," Mantaring said in an interview with reporters.

The NBI chief said that operations involving firecrackers required them to retain custody of the items for evidence. "We cannot risk doing this or else the bureau might burn down," Mantaring stressed.

The NBI director said all firecrackers confiscated by bureau operatives in recent raids would be turned over to the Firearms and Explosives Division of the Philippine National Police.

In last week's operation involving firecrackers, agents of the NBI Anti-Organized Crime Division (AOCD) seized several boxes of the smuggled items worth P30,000 in Tondo, Manila.

NBI agents headed by special investigator Erwin Buenaventura confiscated boxes of smuggled firecrackers from China in a warehouse on Cano Street allegedly owned by Chinese-Filipino businessman Robert Tiu.

Tiu faces charges for violation of Section 4 and 6 in relation to Section II of Republic Act 7183 or an Act Regulating the Scale, Manufacture, Distribution and Use of Firecrackers and Other Pyrotechnic Devices.

A musical puts Christ back in Christmas

By Tarra V. Quismundo

A ROUSING RENDITION OF TRADItional Christmas songs one evening this December reminded people just what the celebration was all about.

A rare church Christmas concert filled the Santuario de San Antonio in Forbes Park with the sounds of well-loved carols on Dec. 14.

It was the first Adeste Fideles performance for the benefit of typhoon victims in Sorsogon and the teacher training program of the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP).

At a time when Christmas had become a season of endless partying, shopping and revelry, Makati City's business leaders teamed up with the nation's top musical acts to remind everyone solemnly of the reason for the season.

"We have Christmas concerts in hotels and concert halls, but hardly a major concert in a church. And that is the religious root of Christmas, and so we wanted to have a concert in an appropriate setting," said concert organizer and MAP member Eduardo Yap.

The sold-out musical event, named after the beloved Christmas hymn "O Come All Ye Faithful," packed Santuario beyond capacity. Diplomats, government officials, top businessmen, Forbes Park residents and parishioners were in the audience.

"Certainly, it will reinforce the spiritual meaning of Christmas because of the selections in the repertoire. This is a classical Christmas concert consisting of traditional hymns sung in a classical manner by soloists in a baroque-style Church," said Yap, who first conceptualized the Christmas concert in 2001.

Yap said there might be only a few such Christmas concerts in Metro Manila.

The property developer, who admitted to being an amateur in organizing musical events, envisioned Adeste Fideles, which took six months to prepare, as a concert that would encourage other parishes to hold Christmas musicals to remind the congregation what the celebration was all about.

"Unfortunately, it is a worldwide trend that Christmas is becoming very commercialized so its spiritual roots are fading. And when people sing Christmas songs now, (they seem to do it) automatically, without understanding what the lyrics mean," Yap said.

"But when you are inside a church, you'll absorb the meaning and significance of Christmas—that the birth of Christ gave rise to hope, unity and redemption," he continued.

Among the songs performed by soloists and choirs during the two-hour program were traditional carols including "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," which trumpeted the coming of child Jesus; "Adeste Fideles," a song that calls on believers "to come with joy and in triumph to adore" Christ; "Joy to the World," "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "O Holy Night," "A Child Was Born," "Ave Maria," and "The First Noel."

The all-Filipino artists' lineup included renowned tenors Otoniel Gonzaga, George Yang and Francisco Aseniero; acclaimed sopranos Camille Lopez, Rachelle Gerodias and Karla Gutierrez; Coro Tomasino of the University of Santo Tomas, the award-winning Chiang Kai Shek College children's choir, the Philippines Children's Choir of Mandaluyong, and Santuario's decades-old Coro de San Antonio.

Musical accompaniment and intermissions were provided by the Manila Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Rodel Colmenar.

"Judging from the applause and standing ovation, the concert was very well received. In fact, I have been receiving congratulatory messages from those who saw the concert," Yap said.

Staged through the joint efforts of MAP and a parish organizing committee, the concert was sold out roughly two months before actual performance.

Yap could not say for sure whether Adeste Fideles will be staged again next December. But he said corporate sponsors had offered to help. "If this concert becomes a tradition, in a way, we will be enriching the Christmas celebration in the country and also help promote local artists," Yap said.

METROBRIEFS

Holiday on the run

A SEXAGENARIAN spent his Christmas on the run from the law after he allegedly hacked his wife to death on Saturday in Quezon City, according to police. Investigators are hunting down Loreto Bilesario, 64, who allegedly killed his wife 61-year-old wife Gloria in their house at 113 Riverside, Unit 4, Barangay Commonwealth, police said. Based on a report by PO3 Mario Turiano, the couple were overheard arguing heatedly outside their house by their daughter-in-law Armie Joy at past 1 p.m. At the height of the argument, Loreto allegedly took his wife by the arm and dragged her inside the house, prompting the alarmed Armie Joy to call for help, Turiano said. But when Armie and a sister-in-law entered the house to check on the couple, they found Gloria lying in a pool of blood, police said. Loreto was nowhere to be found, and is presumed to be in hiding, Turiano said. Gloria's body was taken to the crime laboratory for autopsy.

DJ Yap

Christmas in hospital

WHILE other children were kept busy opening their Christmas presents yesterday, an 11-year-old girl was fighting for her life in a hospital after she was hit by a bus in Las Piñas City. Jean Panong, together with a friend, was making the rounds of the city asking for Christmas gifts (*namamasko*) when the accident happened at around 11:30 a.m. yesterday in front of the City Hall, said SPO2 Bart Reformado. Romualdo Vizarra, a bus driver, was cruising on the westbound lane of the Alabang-Zapote Road when Panong suddenly crossed the road. "The driver said he immediately stepped on the brakes, but it was too late," Reformado said.. The victim was rushed to the Perpetual Help Medical Center. A hospital staff member said Panong's condition was unstable so she was moved to another hospital.

Jocelyn R. Uy

The price of loyalty

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POlice (PNP) has linked Abra Gov. Vicente Valera to the assassination of Rep. Luis Bersamin, but it admits that what it has is still hearsay.

Director General Oscar Calderon, PNP chief, made the admission, saying the confession of a suspect now in custody was not enough to pin the governor.

If there's not much evidence to nail Valera, why did Calderon come up with this press release last week? Obviously, Calderon's announcement was meant to please his distant cousin, President Macapagal-Arroyo, who had ordered the arrest of Bersamin's killers and the mastermind.

Calderon should know that high-profile crimes are not solved by issuing press releases to please the public and the Boss.

The eager-beaver PNP chief should have waited for all the evidence to be turned in before finally putting finis to the case.

* * *

We will continue to have an inept PNP and National Bureau of Investigation so long as the two agencies are led by people who think they owe their positions to the powers-that-be and not to the people.

If the PNP and the NBI are used to harass personal enemies, things will only get worse instead of better for the two law enforcement agencies.

The same thing can be said of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), now divided into two sets of officers corps with different loyalties: One loyal to the President Arroyo, the Commander in Chief, and the other to the law.

* * *

The AFP celebrated its 71st anniversary last Thursday in a somber mood.

At no time in its history is it riven by deep division within its ranks. Some of its best officers in the elite Army Rangers and Marines are in jail, suspected of being involved in a plot to oust a Commander in Chief many perceive to be illegitimate.

The President continues to hold on to power only because she knows how to choose her AFP chiefs of staff. The present one used to be her chief bodyguard.

But there may come a time when she might run out of fiercely loyal subordinates, and that will be the day!

* * *

Expect the war with the Abu Sayyaf to falter with the withdrawal of US troops in Sulu and Basilan, the bandit group's bases.

All because of a judge who puts the interest of a supposed rape victim over that of the country.

Okay, okay, we are a sovereign nation and not a puppet of the US (Oh yeah? Some people would make that snide remark) and therefore, our rules should be followed. But if we have that attitude, other nations that have treaties or planning to have treaties with us can no longer trust us because we have reneged on a treaty obligation.

The Visiting Forces Agreement provides that custody of US servicemen charged in our courts will be handled by the US government during the judicial proceedings. "Judicial proceedings" is interpreted to include the appeal.

But Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon, who's been lionized for his controversial decision convicting US Marine Cpl. Daniel Smith, thinks judicial proceedings ended with Smith's conviction.

The Abu Sayyaf is probably rejoicing now since, without US troops, they can easily handle our inept military.

* * *

For two months now, the cargo carousel at the Puerto Princesa City International Airport has not been working. I feel embarrassed when I see foreign tourists complaining about the hassle.

What happened to the P40 that each departing passenger pays for airport maintenance?

Ethiopia declares war on Somalia

BAIDOA, SOMALIA—ETHIOPIAN Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said on Sunday he was waging war against Somalia's Islamists to protect his country's sovereignty, intensifying a conflict that threatens to engulf the Horn of Africa.

It was Ethiopia's first public admission of military involvement in Somalia, where for the first time it sent warplanes on Sunday to pound the Islamist fighters now encircling the weak interim government.

Ethiopian officials have said the Somalia Islamic Courts Council (SICC), which now controls most of Somalia except for the government-held town of Baidoa, is a terrorist group backed by Ethiopia's enemy, Eritrea.

"Ethiopian defense forces were forced to enter into war to the protect the sovereignty of the nation and to blunt repeated attacks by Islamic courts terrorists and anti-Ethiopian elements they are supporting," Meles said in a televised address.

"Our defense forces will leave as soon as they end their mission."

Despite the military campaign, Meles said Ethiopia supported talks between the two sides to set up a joint administration.

Earlier, Ethiopian Information Minister Berhan Hailu said the operation had targeted several sections of the battle front including Dinsoor, Bandiradley and Baladwayne and the town of Buur Hakaba, close to Baidoa. Fighting on the front has now raged for six days.

Somalia's ambassador to Ethiopia, Abdikarin Farah, said government forces had killed 500 Islamist troops, most of them Eritreans, in two days of heavy fighting, but there was no independent confirmation of the death toll.

Farah said the Islamists had killed 10 government soldiers and wounded 13. He said the government had taken 280 prisoners, including Pakistanis, Afghans and Sudanese.

The Islamists, armed with machine-guns and mortars, say they have killed hundreds of pro-government troops, but aid agencies put the total number of dead at dozens.

The Islamists claim broad popular support and say their main aim is to restore order to Somalia after years of warlord rule and anarchy.

They said Ethiopia, which has also sent tanks towards the front in the last few days, had used MiG fighters and helicopters against their forces. Somali witnesses reported that the aircraft had been firing missiles.

Ali Dahir Horow, a resident of Baladwayne, 300 km north of Mogadishu, said one air strike killed two people.

"People started fleeing once the planes fired at the town," he said, adding that most of the missiles nearby hit Ceel Jaale, which many people escaped to after last month's heavy flooding.

Diplomats fear the war will not only suck in Ethiopia and Eritrea but also attract foreign jihadists answering the Islamists' call for a holy war against Christian-led Ethiopia.

"There is a risk that the civil conflict in Somalia will develop into a regional war. And that could make an already serious situation even more serious," Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt told Sweden's national news agency. *Reuters*

CHRISTMAS IN A MUSLIM NATION
Pakistani Christians attend the special prayer for Christmas at St. Anthony's Church late Dec. 24 in Lahore, Pakistan. Pakistani Christians, who account for about 3.8 million of Pakistan's 140 million people, celebrate Christmas amid lingering fears of attacks by radical Muslims. AP

Italian who met Litvinenko arrested

ROME—POLICE IN NAPLES ON Sunday arrested the Italian man who met poisoned Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko on the day he fell ill, but apparently on unrelated charges, Italy's Ansa news agency announced.

Mario Scaramella was arrested in the southern Italian city on his arrival from London, where he had been hospitalized for checks after traces of polonium 210, the poison which killed Litvinenko, were found in his body.

He was then taken to Rome and held at the captial's Regina Coeli prison.

Scaramella is being investigated by Italian prosecutors for arms trafficking, the agency reported, a probe launched before the Litvinenko case captured world headlines.

He was arrested by agents from Italy's special antiterrorism unit, the Digos, and was to be sent to Rome.

London's Metropolitain police said that Scaramella's arrest was not related to their inquiries into Litvinenko's death.

A mysterious figure described as a security expert and international consultant, Scaramella met Litvinenko at a Japanese restaurant in London Nov. 1.

Shortly after, the former Russian spy experienced his first symptoms of polonium poisoning. He died Nov. 23, in a dramatic case that has affected relations between Britain and Russia.

Besides arms trafficking, Scaramella has been targeted in inquiries related to violating legislation on the disposal of non-dangerous waste, libel and giving the legal authorities false information. *AFP*

Pinochet leaves behind letter defending coup, 17-year iron rule

SANTIAGO—IN A LETTER written before his death and published on Sunday, former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet defended his 1973 coup and the methods used to impose order during his 17-year rule.

Pinochet, who died on Dec. 10 at age 91, said he launched the coup on Sept. 11, 1973, to prevent Chile from sliding into civil war between opponents and supporters of socialist President Salvador Allende, who was toppled that day.

The late general defended his dictatorship, during which some 3,000 people died in political violence—the vast majority killed by Pinochet's police and secret agents—and some 28,000 people were tortured.

"The use of different methods of military control, like temporary detentions, official exile and execution by court-martial were necessary," Pinochet said in his letter, released by his family and published in several Chilean newspapers.

He said in many cases, it would never be established how or why the victims of the violence died.

"Serious conflicts are like that and always will be: They give rise to abuses and exaggerations," the former general wrote in the letter.

"... with all sincerity I can say that I am proud of the enormous action which I had to undertake to stop Marxist-Leninism assuming total power...," Pinochet said.

"Nevertheless, if I were repeating the experience, I would want more wisdom."

Pinochet said that during the dictatorship, he acted "with rigor, but with much more flexibility than has been recognized."

Decades after he seized power and 17 years after he relinquished it, Pinochet's legacy is still hotly debated.

The general's supporters say he saved their South American nation from Communism, while his opponents say he was a mass murderer who should have been tried for human rights abuses.

Some 60,000 people, most of them ardent supporters of the general, filed past his body this month as it lay in state in the Chilean capital Santiago before his funeral on Dec. 12.

Elsewhere in the city, thousands of Pinochet opponents celebrated his death, cracking open bottles of champagne and dancing in the streets. *Reuters*

FBI rebuked over Oklahoma bombing probe

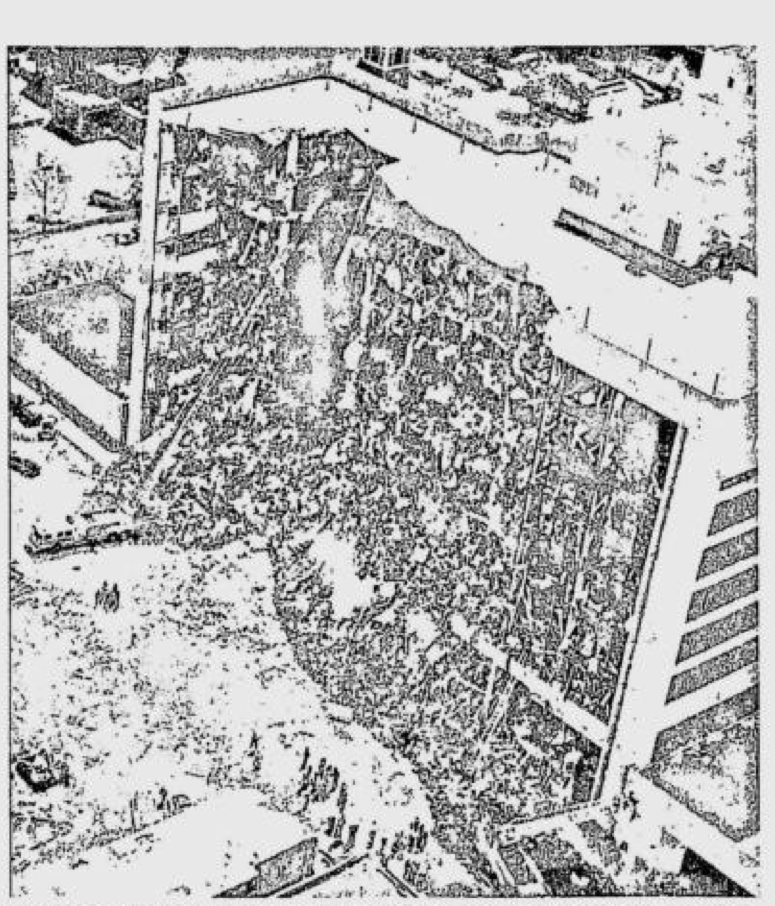
WASHINGTON—A TWO-YEAR congressional inquiry into the Oklahoma City bombing concludes that the FBI did not fully investigate whether other suspects may have helped Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols with the deadly 1995 attack, allowing questions to linger a decade later.

The House of Representatives' International Relations investigative subcommittee will release the findings of its two-year review as early as Wednesday, declaring there is no conclusive evidence of a foreign connection to the attack but far too many unanswered questions remain.

The subcommittee's report will conclude there is no doubt McVeigh and Nichols were the main perpetrators, and it discloses for the first time that Nichols confirmed to House investigators he participated in the robbery of an Arkansas gun dealer that provided the proceeds for the attack.

There have long been questions about that robbery because the FBI concluded McVeigh was in another state at the time it occurred.

The report also sharply criticizes the FBI for failing to be curious enough to pursue credible information that foreign or US citizens may have had contact with Nichols or McVeigh and could have assisted their plot.



THE ALFRED Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City sits in ruin after an explosion April 19, 1995. AP

"We did our best with limited resources, and I think we moved the understanding of this issue forward a couple of notches even though important questions remain unanswered," Republican Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, the subcommittee chair, said.

The report rebukes the FBI for not fully pursuing leads suggesting other suspects may have provided support to McVeigh and Nichols before their truck bomb killed 168 people in the main federal building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995.

The report says the inadequacy of the bureau's work was exposed two years ago when some bombing evidence overlooked for 10 years was discovered in a home linked to Nichols that had been searched repeatedly by agents.

It also notes that McVeigh failed a polygraph when he was asked a question about whether other perpetrators were involved.

FBI spokesperson Richard Kolko said Sunday the FBI had not seen the report but that it remains confident its agents conducted a thorough investigation.

"The Oklahoma City bombing case was the largest case the FBI worked on before 9/11," Kolko said. "Agents at virtually every office, domestically and overseas, covered thousands of leads. Every bit of information was investigated and reviewed." *AP*

Singer James Brown, 'Godfather of Soul'; 73

ATLANTA—JAMES BROWN, THE legendary singer known as the "Godfather of Soul," has died in Atlanta, his agent said early Monday. He was 73.

Brown was hospitalized Sunday at Emory Crawford Long Hospital with pneumonia and died around 1:45 a.m. Monday, said his agent, Frank Copsidas, of Intrigue Music.

Along with Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan and a handful of others, Brown was one of the major musical influences of the past 50 years. At least one generation idolized him, and sometimes openly copied him.

His rapid-footed dancing inspired Mick Jagger and Michael Jackson among others. Songs such as David Bowie's "Fame," Prince's "Kiss," George Clinton's "Atomic Dog" and Sly and the Family Stone's "Sing a Simple Song" were clearly based on Brown's rhythms and vocal style.

If Brown's claim to the invention of soul can be challenged by fans of Ray Charles and Sam Cooke, then his rights to the genres of rap, disco and funk are beyond question. He was to rhythm and dance music what Dylan was to lyrics: the unchallenged popular innovator.

"James presented obviously the best grooves," rapper Chuck D of Public Enemy once told The Associated Press. "To this day, there has been no one near as funky. No one's coming even close."

His hit singles include such classics as "Out of Sight," "(Get Up I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine," "I Got You (I Feel Good)" and "Say It Out Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud," a landmark 1968 statement of racial pride.

"I clearly remember we were calling ourselves colored, and after the song, we were calling ourselves black," Brown said in a 2003 AP interview. "The song showed even people to that day that lyrics and music and a song can change society."

BROWN belting out a song at a rock festival in New York on August 12, 1972. AP

He won a Grammy award for lifetime achievement in 1992, as well as Grammys in 1965 for "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" (best R&B recording) and for "Living In America" in 1987 (best R&B vocal performance, male.) He was one of the initial artists inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986, along with Presley, Chuck Berry and other founding fathers.

He triumphed despite an often unhappy personal life. Brown, who lived in Beech Island near the Georgia line, spent more than two years in a South Carolina prison for aggravated assault and failing to stop for a police officer. After his release on in 1991, Brown said he wanted to "try to straighten out" rock music. *AP*

Kids not always moms' blessings, study says

CHICAGO—MOTHERS WHO fret that their children will send them to an early grave may be closer to the truth than they think, a study released Monday suggested.

Frequent childbirth and the rigors of child rearing take a heavy toll on a mother's health and life expectancy, and even jeopardizes the well-being of her later-born children.

A study of 19th century US Mormons showed that for humans, as for other species, there is a trade-off between reproduction and survival—especially for women, said the Austrian researchers from the Konrad Lorenz Institute for Ethology in Vienna.

The findings also suggest that the last-born in a large brood of children are less robust than their older siblings, and if this is anything to go by, may not survive to have families of their own.

The researchers based their analysis on statistical data for 21,000 Utah couples who were married between 1860 and 1895, and went on to have an average of nine children, and 16 grandchildren.

They found that the women's survival rates declined as the number of children in their brood increased, possibly because they had the children in quick succession—something that other studies have shown to bring a higher risk of disease and death.

The researchers also reported that the youngest children in a large brood were least likely to make it past the age of 18 than their older siblings, and the outlook was particularly bleak for the youngest siblings in a family of 12 or more children. *AFP*

Iran vows to continue nuke program

TEHRAN—IRAN CONDEMNED A UN SANCTIONS RESOLUTION as "a piece of torn paper" that would not scare Tehran and vowed on Sunday to speed up uranium enrichment work.

The UN Security Council voted unanimously on Saturday to impose sanctions on Iran's trade in sensitive nuclear materials and technology, in an attempt to stop uranium enrichment work that could produce material to be used in bombs.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said those who backed the UN resolution, drawn up by Britain, France and Germany and supported unanimously by the Security Council, would soon regret their "superficial act."

"It is a piece of torn paper... by which they aim to scare Iranians... It is in the Westerners' interest to live with a nuclear Iran," the semi-official Fars news agency quoted Ahmadinejad as saying.

"Give up this muppet show. You cannot send secret friendly messages to us and at the same time show your teeth and claws," Ahmadinejad was quoted by the official Irna news agency as saying in a speech at the former US Embassy in Tehran.

Iran has condemned the resolution as illegal. Ahmadinejad hinted that the resolution would alter Iran's relationship with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"Unfortunately such illegal decisions will push Iran to reconsider its relationship with international organization," the student's news agency Isna quoted Ahmadinejad as saying.

Iran has already banned IAEA snap inspections of its nuclear plants in February as a response to the referral of its nuclear case to the Security Council.

Chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani said Iran would respond by going ahead with plans to install 3,000 centrifuges by March at its pilot plant in Natanz. It already has two cascades of 164 centrifuges running.

"We will start our installation activities at the Natanz facility from Sunday," he told the Kayhan newspaper. "It is our immediate answer to the resolution and we will go ahead with full speed."

It was not clear whether work actually began on Sunday.

Iran has refused to end its uranium enrichment work in exchange for economic incentives.

China urged a resumption of talks to defuse the confrontation and French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy said on France Inter radio: "I would not want to see Iran fall into a spiral that would be an isolationist spiral."

The resolution demands Iran end all research on uranium enrichment, which can produce fuel for nuclear power plants as well as for bombs, and halt all research and development on methods of producing or delivering atomic weapons.

The thrust of the sanctions is a ban on imports and exports of dangerous materials and technology relating to uranium enrichment, reprocessing and heavy-water reactors, as well as ballistic missile delivery systems. *Reuters*

Daily: Japan considered developing nuke warhead

TOKYO—THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT recently looked into the possibility of developing nuclear warhead, a news report said Monday, citing an internal government document.

Yasuhisa Shiozaki, the government's top spokesperson, however, denied any knowledge of such a document.

The Japanese daily Sankei reported that experts at government organizations concluded that it would be impossible for Japan to develop nuclear weapons within a year or two, and that it would take at least three to five years to make a prototype nuclear warhead.

The experts also estimated that Japan would need to spend about 200 billion yen ($1.68 billion) to 300 billion yen ($2.52 billion) and mobilize several hundred engineers to produce a prototype nuclear warhead, according to Sankei.

The experts said that while Japan had uranium enrichment plants and the capability and facilities to reprocess spent nuclear fuel, it lacked technology to swiftly convert those resources to a weapon.

Fuel currently on hand is suited for a light-water reactor but not for a weapon, and Japan would need to build a graphite-moderated reactor to produce plutonium 239 efficiently as well as a means to reprocess spent fuel from that reactor, the document was quoted as saying.

Academics have said that Japan could make a nuclear device in half a year, or according to some, as little as two months.

The experts did not say whether Japan should develop nuclear weapons, according to the summary of the document titled "On the Possibility of Developing Nuclear Weapons Domestically," dated Sept. 20 and carried by the paper.

"The government is not aware of such a document," Shiozaki told reporters at a regular press conference.

As the only country ever attacked by atomic weapons, Japan has for decades espoused a strict policy of not possessing, developing or allowing the introduction of nuclear bombs on its territory.

The non-nuclear stance, however, has come under increasing scrutiny since North Korea conducted its first nuclear test on Oct. 9, which raised severe security concerns in Japan, and broader fears that a regional arms race could be triggered. Just months prior to the North's nuclear test, it test-fired several ballistic missiles capable of hitting Japan.

Several politicians have suggested that Japan should at least debate going nuclear following the Oct. 9 test.

The government, under newly elected Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, has said the country's pacifist Constitution does not ban it from possessing nuclear weapons for self-defense, but stressed that Japan would stick to its policy of forbidding nuclear weapons on Japanese soil. *AP, Reuters*

FESTIVAL IN SAHARA

Fantasia riders perform at the opening of the Sahara International Festival in Douz, southwestern Tunisia, Dec. 24. The 39th International Sahara Festival, held in the city of Douz draws locals and tourists alike for a cultural event that celebrates the region's heritage and desert peoples. AFP

Low-caste girl in India pays bloody price for hunger

NEW DELHI—A HUNGRY 10-YEAR-OLD girl from India's lowest Hindu caste had all the fingers of her right hand chopped off by an upper-caste landowner for taking a few spinach leaves from his field, the Hindustan Times reported on Monday.

The attack took place in a village in Bhagalpur district last week in impoverished Bihar state in the east where caste prejudice against Dalits—formerly called "untouchables"—is widespread and sometimes results in violence against them.

Police in Bhagalpur in eastern Bihar said they would soon arrest the upper-caste landowner who used a sickle to wound the girl whose name was given as "Khushboo."

"We will get results. This is terrible," Superintendent of Police J.S. Gangwar was quoted as saying in the newspaper.

Khushboo's father said that he and his wife—both laborers—had nothing to eat in their house so they sent their daughter to collect herbs that grew along a railway line.

"She just strayed (to the landlord's field) and plucked a few leaves," Sukho Ram was quoted as saying.

Dalits make up around 16 percent of India's 1.1-billion population and still face discrimination in rural areas from higher castes and sometimes are victims of rape and murder.

They are not allowed to enter some Hindu temples.

But Dalits have also held high office. India's first Dalit president K.R. Narayanan held office from 1997 to 2002.

Last week, law ministry officials said Justice K.G. Balakrishnan would become the first Dalit chief justice of India's powerful Supreme Court in January next year.

Affirmative action in colleges, universities and in government jobs has benefited a small section of Dalits.

But many work as laborers, sweepers and toilet cleaners. *Reuters*

US forces detaining Iranians caught in raids in Iraq

BAGHDAD, IRAQ—THE AMERICAN military is holding at least four Iranians in Iraq, including men the Bush administration called senior military officials, who were seized in a pair of raids late last week aimed at people suspected of conducting attacks on Iraqi security forces, according to senior Iraqi and American officials in Baghdad and Washington.

The Bush administration made no public announcement of the politically delicate seizure of the Iranians, though in response to specific questions the White House confirmed Sunday that the Iranians were in custody.

Gordon D. Johndroe, the spokesperson for the National Security Council, said two Iranian diplomats were among those initially detained in the raids. The two had papers showing that they were accredited to work in Iraq, and he said they were turned over to the Iraqi authorities and released. He confirmed that a group of other Iranians, including the military officials, remained in custody while an investigation continued.

One official said that "a lot of material" was seized in the raid, but would not say if it included arms or documents that pointed to planning for attacks. Much of the material was still being examined, the official said.

Nonetheless, the two raids, in central Baghdad, have deeply upset Iraqi government officials, who have been making strenuous efforts to engage Iran on matters of security. At least two of the Iranians were in this country on an invitation extended by Iraq's president, Jalal Talabani, during a visit to Tehran earlier this month.

It was particularly awkward for the Iraqis that one of the raids took place in the Baghdad compound of Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, one of Iraq's most powerful Shiite leaders, who traveled to Washington three weeks ago to meet President Bush.

Iraqi leaders appealed to the American military, including to Gen. George W. Casey Jr., the senior American ground commander in Iraq, to release the Iranians, according to an Iraqi politician familiar with the efforts.

A Bush administration official said the Iranian military officials held in custody were suspected of being members of the Quds force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. It has been involved in training members of Hezbollah and other groups that the Americans regard as terrorist organizations.

American and Iraqi officials have long accused Iran of interfering in this country's internal affairs, but have rarely produced evidence. *NYT*

Bush confident and forceful outside; inside, who can tell?

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg

WASHINGTON—PRESIDENT BUSH marched into his year-end news conference last week with the usual zip in his step. As always, he professed little worry about his legacy or the polls. As always, he said the United States would win in Iraq. The nation might despair, but not Bush; his presidential armor seemed firmly intact.

Yet a longtime friend of Bush's recently spotted a tiny crack in that armor. "He looked tired, for the first time, which I hadn't seen before," this friend said.

The president can never really escape the rigors of his job, Laura Bush, the first lady, said in an interview on Sunday on the CBS news program "Face the Nation." "Sure, he lives with it, 24 hours a day," Laura Bush said. "You don't have his job and not live with it 24 hours a day."

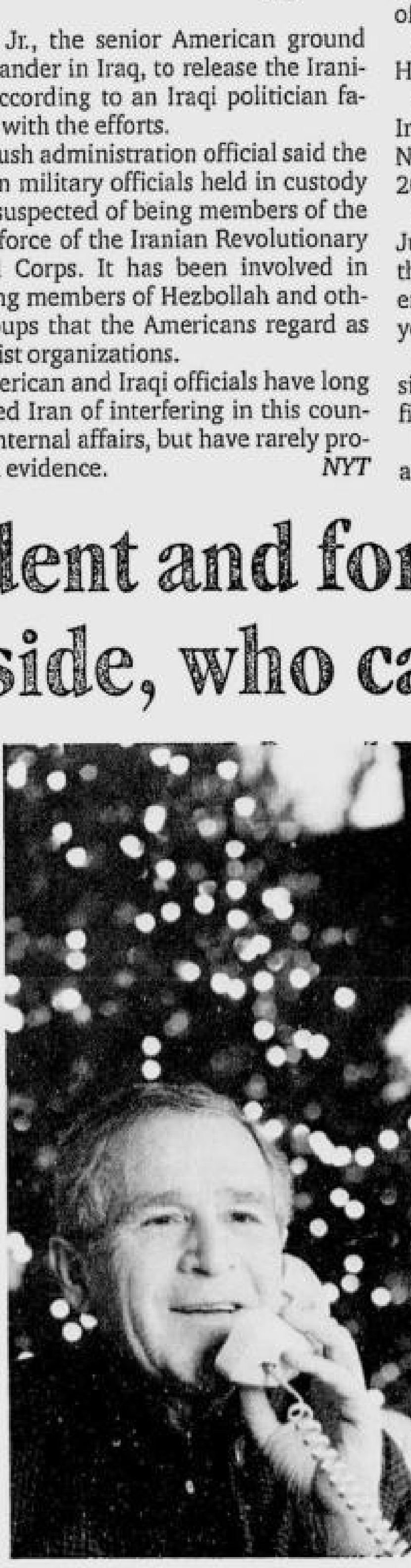
But as to whether he second-guesses himself, Bush gives little quarter, reducing such inquiries to the broad-brush question of whether it was correct to topple Saddam Hussein. Nor does the president seem to question his handling of the postwar period.

His friend, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Bush still believed that Donald H. Rumsfeld "did a great job overall" as the secretary of defense, despite the president's decision to replace him after Democrats swept the November elections.

"I think he knows it's bad over there," this person said, "but I'm not quite sure he fully appreciates the incompetence of what's gone on."

Yet the war is clearly very much on the president's mind. When Bush met privately last week with a dozen rabbis and Jewish educators, they expected he might open the conversation by talking about Israel. Instead, the president greeted them in the Roosevelt Room of the White House with a discourse on Iraq, and why he still believes it can be a beacon for democracy in the Middle East.

"I got the sense of a man who feels very heavily the weight of history," said Robert Wexler, president of the University of Judaism, in Los Angeles, who attended the meeting, "but I didn't get the sense of someone who feels he's doing the wrong thing. He said, 'I might change tactics, but I'm not going to change the way I feel about it.'" *NYT*



BUSH making Christmas Eve telephones calls at Camp David Dec. 24. REUTERS

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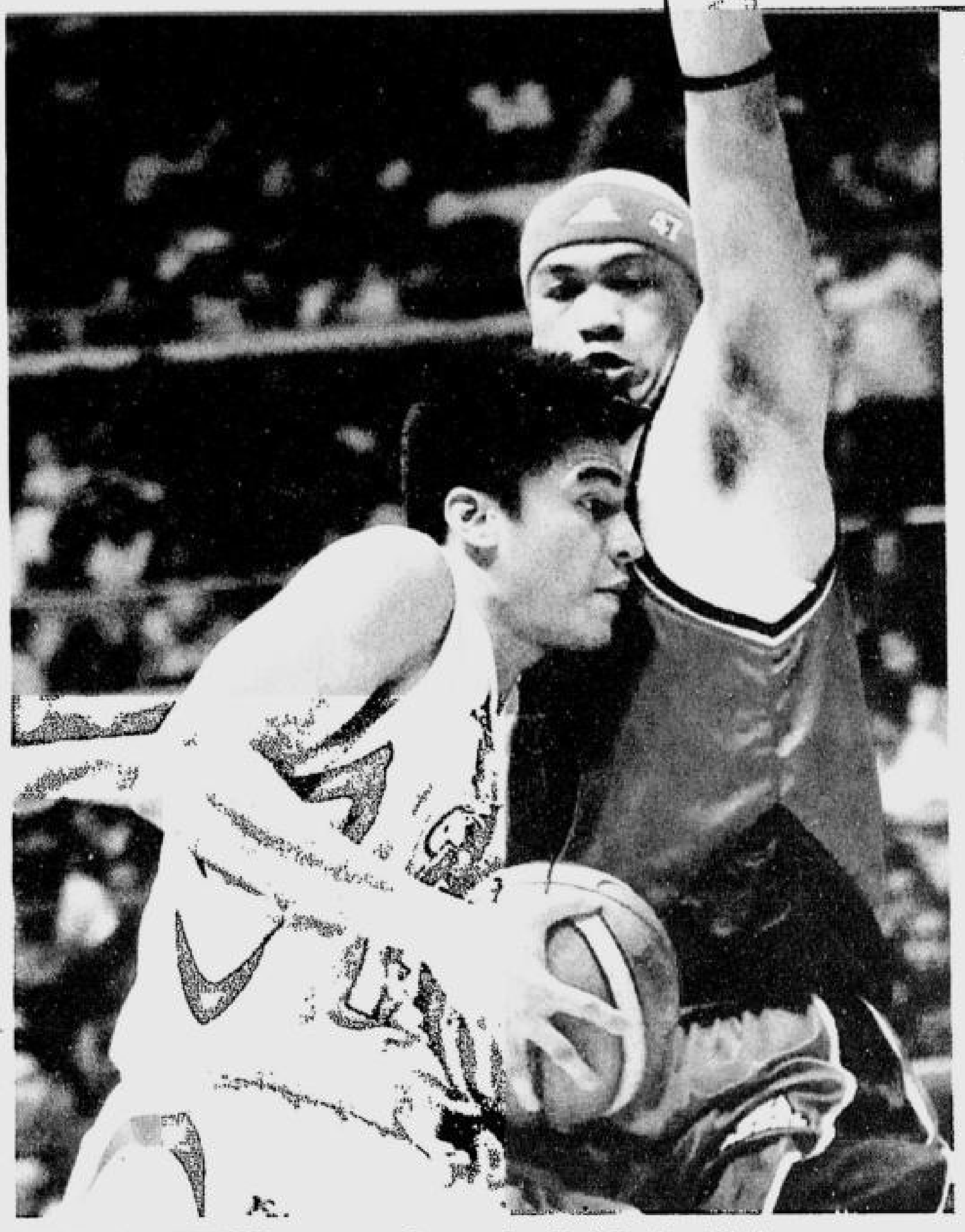

MAC Cardona of Talk 'N Text gets no moving room from Mark Caguioa of Ginebra. AUGUST DELA CRUZ

Phone Pals crush Kings, gain q'finals

By Musong R. Castillo

IT REALLY WAS NOT THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR FOR A lot yesterday.

Especially for two teams that did not even play, and most of 18,000 fans who filled the Araneta Coliseum for the final elimination round playdate of the Talk 'N Text Philippine Cup.

This, after a grimly determined Talk 'N Text side bombarded crowd-darling Barangay Ginebra from inside and out in the second half last night to run away with a 115-104 victory that shoved the Phone Pals into the quarterfinals.

The powerhouse Phone Pals played true to form, flaunting complete control when it mattered most to extend their mastery of the elimination round topnotchers Kings and close out their sked with a 10-8 slate.

The TNT win pushed Purefoods and Sta. Lucia into a playoff for the No. 5 spot.

The defending champion Chunkee Giants and the Realtors actually were the first to chalk up 10-8 tallies, but lost in the quotient system to TNT.

The loser of the Purefoods-Sta. Lucia playoff will join Alaska, Air21 and Coca-Cola in the wildcard phase.

Game on Jan. 3 *(Cuneta Astrodome)*
7 p.m.—Purefoods vs Sta. Lucia

Ren-Ren Ritualo came off the bench at a critical moment late in the third period to score 19 of his 20 points and fuel the Talk 'N Text breakaway that hushed a stunned SRO crowd.

Harvey Carey and Asi Taulava, meanwhile, did their damage inside the paint and the rest of the team made the Phone Pals look so good because of the way they ran the break and played a floating zone defense that befuddled the Kings.

"We had to come out really strong," coach Derrick Pumaren later said. "The boys really wanted to win this game and this impresses me because we finally won a game that we needed to win."

With the Phone Pals ahead by just two, 71-69, Ritualo scored seven straight points and helped Talk 'N Text close out the period with an 85-78 lead.

He then had three triples and all of his 12 fourth quarter points in the first five minutes of the payoff frame as the Phone Pals dropped a 19-5 bomb for a 104-83 lead with 6:54 to go.

San Miguel closed out its elimination round schedule earlier with a 13-5 card after holding off a hard-finishing Air21, 108-104.

The Beermen opened up hot to lead by 27 points late in the second period and still salvaged the win despite finishing cold.

The scores:

First Game

SAN MIGUEL 108—Tugade 19, Adducul 16, Seigle 16, Espinas 12, Ildefonso 11, Pena 11, Racela 9, Tenorio 6, Hontiveros 4, Wilson 2, Calaguio 2, Gonzales 0.

AIR21 104—David 34, Canaleta 18, Y. De Ocampo 14, Santos 7, Telan 7, Arboleda 7, Sotto 2, Billones 2, Avenido 2, Dimaunahan 0, Bernardo 0.

Quarters: 34-20, 63-40, 81-69, 108-104.

Second Game

TALK 'N TEXT 115—Carey 21, Cardona 20, Ritualo 20, Taulava 19, Pablo 10, Washington 9, Alapag 6, Noble 5, Belano 3, Allado 2.

BARANGAY GINEBRA 104—Helterbrand 29, reavis 17, Salvacion 16, Caguioa 16, Hatfield 12, Menk 6, Abarrientos 6, Macapagal 2, Holper 0, Tubid 0, Mamaril 0, Seigle 0.

Quarters: 29-27, 50-49, 85-78, 115-104.

'Redeeming value' from stormy POC meet

By Marc Anthony Reyes

THE RECENT STORMY MEETING of the top officials of the Philippine Olympic Committee that almost went out of hand should have a "redeeming value" for the country's top sports governing body.

Deputy secretary general Mark Joseph said the incident only "made it harder, if not impossible, not to confront" the problem of meddling and intervention in national sports associations (NSA) affairs.

Joseph said the POC executive committee's plan to implement a process of cleansing and "good housekeeping" should help put redeeming value to the incident.

"It's something the POC execom has been working on already," Joseph told the INQUIRER. "The POC president, Rep. Peping Cojuangco, wanted to put things in order."

The plan, according to Joseph, has the support of three-fourths of all the 40-plus NSAs under the POC umbrella.

"They believe that this is the only way to foster and protect the Olympic movement in the Philippines," added the president of the Philippine Amateur Swimming Association.

Meanwhile, some national sports association heads present in that stormy POC executive committee meeting last Wednesday swore the incident helped eased the tension inside the body brought about by clashing opinions.

"Maybe it could help because the truth came out," POC deputy secretary general Buddy Andrada (lawn tennis), told the INQUIRER.

Andrada didn't deny that he was involved in the near fight where athletics chief Go Teng Kok and POC first vice president Rep. Monico Puentevella (weightlifting) also figured.

Heated words were exchanged, punches were almost thrown and water was splashed during the meeting.

MARK JOSEPH

Thai XI thwarts Vietnam

BANGKOK — HOSTS Thailand topped the standings on the first day of the King's Cup tournament on Sunday after beating rival Vietnam, 2-1, while Singapore and Kazakhstan played out a dour 0-0 draw.

The Thais sealed a well-earned victory with goals from Sarayuth Chaikamdee and Datsakorn Thonglao after Phan Thanh Binh put the Vietnamese side ahead on 35 minutes.

Binh silenced the crowd when he fired home on the turn from three meters after Thai keeper Kittisak Rawangpa failed to collect a header deep into the box from Le Cong Vinh.

Thailand leveled less than a minute later after Kwanchai Fuangprakob's inch-perfect cross beat the Vietnamese keeper and landed on the head of the unmarked Sarayuth.

The hosts took the lead on 61 minutes when evergreen striker Kiatisak "Zico" Senamuang threaded the ball through for Datsakorn to net from six meters.

Thai coach Charnwit Pholcheewin praised his team for their attacking play but said his side was too sloppy at the back. *Reuters*

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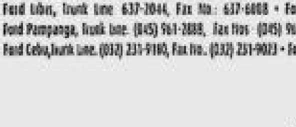

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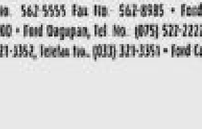

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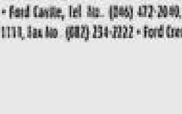

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Bata, 3 other Pinoys seeded to WPA 8-ball

FOUR FILIPINO CUE MASTERS HEADED BY Efren "Bata" Reyes have been seeded to the 2007 WPA World 8-Ball Championship from March 1 to 8, 2007 in Fujairah, United Arab Emirates.

The organizing Asian Pocket Billiards Union (APBU) also seeded Francisco "Django" Bustamante, Alex Pagulayan and reigning World Pool champion Ronnie Alcano.

According to Spencer Shiau, APBU general secretary, the four Filipinos will be among the 12 Asians who will be given slots in the 64-man, $120,000 tournament organized by the World Pool-Billiard Association.

Three of the 12 berths are allotted for players from Middle East countries besides the UAE, while the other nine spots are for cue artists from non-Middle East nations.

Taiwanese Wu Chia-ching, the defending champion, is the only other seeded player for the event which gives the winner $20,000.

Wu, 17, grabbed the title from Reyes, who won the tournament in 2004.

Reyes, known in the sport as the "Magician," has not lost his touch in 8-ball as proven by his victory in the IPT World Open Championship last September in Reno, Nevada, where he copped the top prize of $500,000.

Bustamante, on the other hand, teamed up with Reyes to win the inaugural World Cup of Pool in Wales last August, although the event was a 9-ball tournament.

Pagulayan and Alcano have also made their mark in 9-ball where they are the past and present kings of the World Pool Championship. Pagulayan, a Filipino-Canadian, won the WPC in 2004, while Alcano prevailed last November in a memorable run on home soil.

Besides Wu, the Filipino pool sharks will also have to deal with rivals from Africa, which has three spots reserved in the tournament, plus North America (four spots) Central and South America (two), Europe (16) and Oceania (two). UAE also has 16 spots reserved for its players.

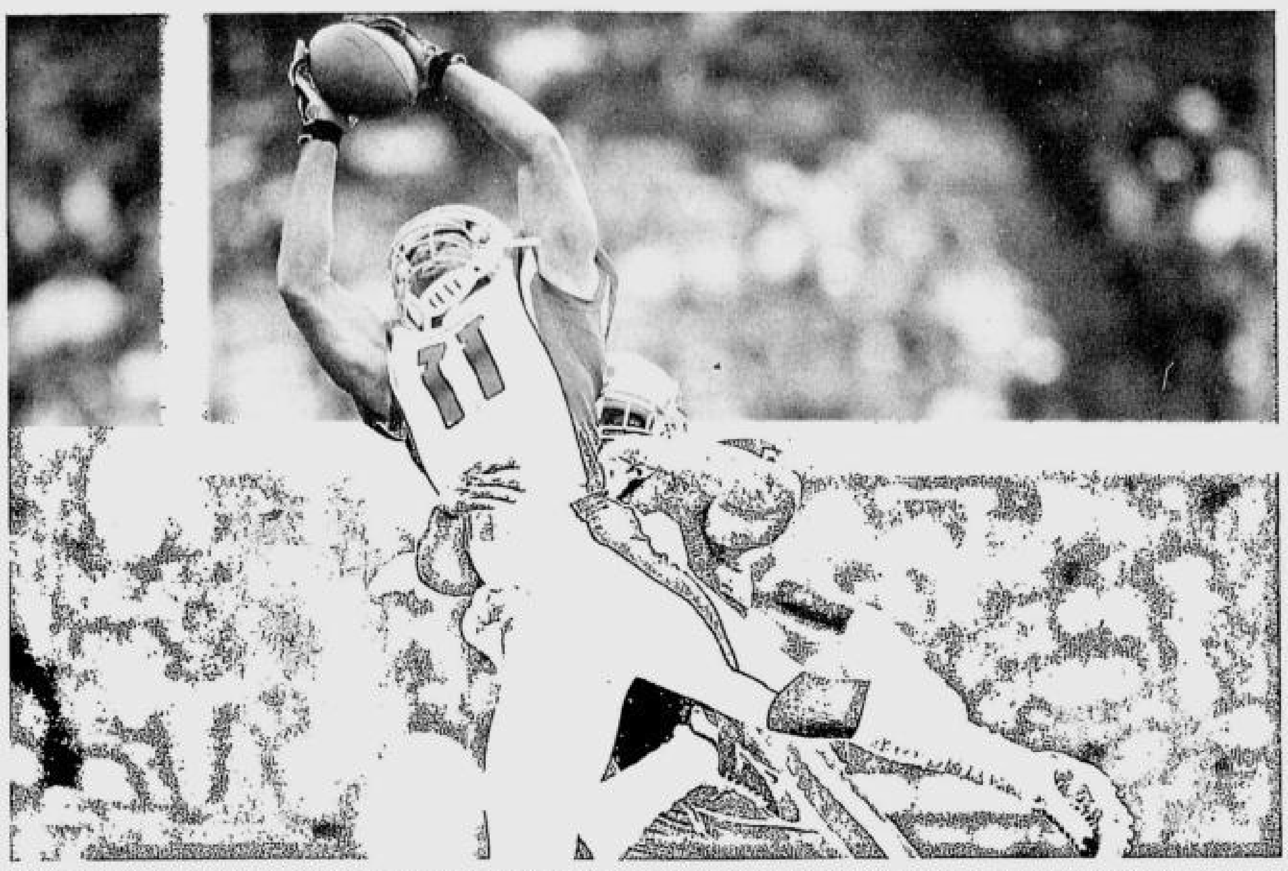
In the latest WPA men's ranking released last month, Alcano was the highest-rated Filipino at 29th with Thorsten Hohmann of Germany at No. 1.

Other RP cue masters on the list were Marlon Manalo (31st), Bustamante (36th), Reyes (37th), Rodolfo Luat (40th), Dennis Orcollo (45th), Pagulayan (54th) and Gandy Valle (84th).

The organizing committee are also eyeing Orcollo and Gabica as possible seeds in the main draw.

The 34-year-old Gabica emerged as the most outstanding Filipino athlete in the Doha Asian Games recently, winning a gold and a silver in 9 ball and 8 ball, respectively.

Orcollo, on the other hand, is the 2006 World Pool league winner. *Marlon Bernardino*



GOTCHA: Larry Fitzgerald of the Arizona Cardinals catches a pass over Keith Lewis of the San Francisco 49ers during an NFL game at Monster Park on Christmas eve in San Francisco, California. AFP

Reyes tops money list with $644,960

POOL MAESTRO EFREN "BATA" Reyes won a total of $644,960 from local and international tournaments to top pro billiards' moneymaker list for the third straight year.

And his countrymen also fared well, with Dennis Orcollo, Ronnie Alcano, Marlon Manalo and Francisco "Django" Bustamante barging into the top 10.

The 52-year-old pool legend Reyes, playing for the Puyat Sports stable, was followed on the list by German pool star Thorsten Hohmann and his compatriot Ralf "Kaiser" Souquet, who earned $394,025 and $204,350, respectively, according to azbilliards.com.

Rounding out the top 10 moneymakers were No. 4 Rodney Morris (US/$214,950), No.5 Orcollo ($ 202,500.00), No. 6 Alcano ($161,754,00). No.7 Mika Immonen (Finland/$158,450), No. 8 Johnny Archer (US/$137,580,00), No.9 Manalo ($112, 271.00) and No.10 Bustamante ($108, 495.00)

Reyes, whose local and international campaign is backed by RP billiards patron Aristeo "Putch" Puyat, actually bagged the money title when he won pool's biggest prize of $500,000 in the IPT World Open 8-Ball Championship last September in Reno, Nevada.

EFREN REYES

However, only 11 percent of the prize has been awarded to Reyes so far due to financial problems bugging the IPT.

IPT owner Kevin Trudeau has repeatedly promised full payment of the prizes to the 200 players who participated in the event.

Reyes also earned $21,500 from three San Miguel Asian 9-Ball Tour stops, two of which he topped.

The 1999 world pool champion also won $65,000 for placing fourth in July's IPT North American Open Championship in Las Vegas and $11,000 for topping the Derby City One Pocket Division in January in Kentucky .

Reyes' listed earnings this year more than doubled his earnings of $279,169 the previous year and almost five times the $124,150 he took home in 2004.

Hohmann got the bulk of his earnings by ruling the IPT North American Open Championship crown worth $350,000.

Souquet climbed up the ladder with his fifth-place finish in the IPT North American event ($50,000), a runner-up finish in the 2006 World Pool Championship ($40,000) and victory in the World Pool Masters ($20,000).

Marlon Bernardino, contributor

Yang keeps Super Cup pool crown

DEFENDING CHAMPION AND TWO-TIME Asian Games winner Yang Shin-chun of Taiwan bested compatriot and 2005 World Pool Champion Wu Chia-ching, 11-2, in the finals to retain his title in the 2006 Power-In Super Cup at the Living Mall in Taipei, Taiwan, late Sunday.

The 27-year-old Kaoshiung pool wizard earlier downed countryman and former World 9-Ball champion Chao Fong-pao, 7-5, in the semis to arrange a titular showdown with Wu, winner over former World Pool ruler Ralf Souquet of Germany in the other semis encounter, 7-2.

On the way to the final four, Yang edged reigning world pool champion Ronnie Alcano of the Philippines (7-6) while another Filipino hopeful Jose "Amang" Parica lost to Wu (4-7).

Tied at 6-6, the 34-year-old Alcano from Calamba City, Laguna, scratched on his break in the final rack, allowing the Taiwanese to nail the victory.

"It was a sorry game but that happens," said Billiards and Snooker Congress of the Philippines (BSCP) president Ernesto "Ernie" Fajardo the other day of Alcano's loss. "It's called breaks of the game."

Yang, who pocketed the top prize worth $20,000, beat 2004 WPC runner-up Chang Pei-Wei (11-8) in last year's finals held at the Core Pacific Mall in Taipei.

In the battle for third, Chao beat Souquet to complete a 1-2-3 finish for the Taiwanese.

Chao (Group B with 4-2-win-loss record but with 37 racks won, three racks ahead of Alcano) and Souquet (Group A with 5-1 win-loss record) topped their respective brackets to advance to the semis. *Marlon Bernardino, contributor*

Brewers acquire Suppan for S42M

NEW YORK—THE MILWAUKEE BREWERS were among the last minute Christmas shoppers on Sunday, signing righthanded pitcher Jeff Suppan to a four-year deal worth $42 million.

The contract is the richest in the history of the Brewers franchise, reported MLB.com.

Suppan, who helped the St Louis Cardinals to the World Series in October, winning the National League Championship Series MVP honours, is scheduled to undergo a physical next week.

"We're jumping the gun a little bit, but we wanted to make an announcement before things leaked out," Brewers general manager Doug Melvin told MLB.com. "There was some momentum to this, so we kept going with it." Suppan has been a work horse throughout his 12-year career, which included stints in Boston, Arizona, Kansas City, Pittsburgh and St Louis, making at least 31 regular-season starts in each of his last eight seasons.

He has compiled a record of 106-101 with a 4.60 ERA in 317 games.

Last season Suppan posted a record of 12-7 with a 4.12 ERA and is 5-2 with a 3.00 ERA in nine playoff starts. *Reuters*

California race team enlists Sy's services

ACE FILIPINO DRIVER TYSON SY WILL strut his stuff in the international arena next year after passing his test in the United States with flying colors.

Team G.FRO, based in San Clemente, California, has tapped the 19-year-old Sy to drive in the 2007 Star Mazda Championship, a major North American open-wheel racing series that has produced the likes of Indycar stars Graham Rahal and Marco Andretti as well as F1 Toro Rosso driver Scott Speed.

The announcement came after Sy tested with the team on Dec. 6 and 8 at the Buttonwillow Raceway Park in California. Sy, driving a F2000 Zetec car for the first time, broke the lap record of team leader and US F2000 Zetec runner-up Dane Cameron during the test.

G.FRO team owner Geoff Flicking said: "It was a pleasure working with Tyson and it was obvious that he definitely is a very quick driver. I think he will no doubt be a contender in the States next season and we all would love for him to drive for our team!

"The Buttonwillow track we tested at is a very challenging circuit. There isn't any room for mistakes because the runoff there is so unforgiving. Tyson did an excellent job of being consistent, fast and precise."

G.FRO is the renamed P-1 Racing Team, which was owned and managed by Bill Flicking, Geoff's father. From 1987 to 2003, the organization won 19 race victories and two Formula Atlantic Championships with Mark Dismore (1990) and the late Filipino racing legend Jovy Marcelo (1991). Over the year, it has enlisted the talents of such CART and Indycar luminaries as Jimmy Vasser, Al Unser III, Derek Hill and Alex Tagliani.

Under the younger Flicking, G.FRO amassed a total of nine victories, nine pole positions and 25 podium finishes in the F2000 Zetec Series from 2003 to 2006.

In 2007, G.FRO will make its move to the Star Mazda Championship where it intends to establish a championship-winning campaign by signing the best drivers and acquiring the best crew and equipment.

Sy, who finished second overall and was the best Asian finisher in the recent Asian Formula Three Series, said, "It is an honor to be a part of the same team that the late Jovy Marcelo drove for. I hope to do the team and the Philippines proud next year."

TYSON Sy listens to instructions from G.FRO driver-coach Dane Cameron (left) before taking the team's F2000 Zetec out on the Buttonwillow Raceway in California for the first time. At right is team owner Geoff Flicking.

Sy is scheduled to return to the US in January to begin his preparation in a Pro Formula Mazda car built by Star Race Cars that features a carbon fiber composite chassis and powered by a 240-hp Mazda "Renesis" rotary engine with six-speed sequential gearbox, which will be used by all the competitors in the championship.

The Star Mazda Championship will be contested over 12 rounds, which will serve as the supporting event for CART and American Le Mans Series.

RACING TIPS

BY TOP CHOICE

Race 1—(Qrt/Tri)—Flynow (4), Jen Is Nice (2), Boss UFO Naman (6), Extreme Courage, Gen-Gen Spirit (3)

Race 2—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—El Cid (4), American Beauty (1), Leading Man (3), Carolina Belle (5), Sta Colony (8)

Race 3—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Pound For Pound (2), Golden Rice (5), Prince Ferdie (6), Gold Seeker (8), Visionary (4)

Race 4—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Royal Rose (7), Top Quesy (10), Gutsy (9), Can And Will (11), Dynamic Jason (4)

Race 5—(Qrt/Tri)—Dona Nene (3), Kumpirmado (4), Blondie Baj (7), Spinning Bullet (8)

Race 6—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Dona Gelay (3), Red Bells (13), Yao Man (10), Honoree (11), Binukalan's Pride (7)

Race 7—(Qrt/Tri)—Cristina (7), Queen Esther (6), Tigerific (8), Queen's Kitty (4)

Race 8—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Scarab (1), Princess Adarna (7), Words Of Joy (5), Gorgeous Sand (4), Seniority (6)

Race 9—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Dondon's Entry (4), Strong Jays (5), Pirouette (7), Galaxy Wars (10), Gigi's Gold (1)

Race 10—(Qrt/Tri)—ITZA Lemon (6), Circulation/Dualargo (5), On the Fiarway (3), Rain Dancer (4)

Race 11—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Miss Malabon (6), Seven Lakes/Papillon (5), Hurry Prince (8), Dancing Slew (1), Just Joshua (11)

Race 12—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Real Black (1), Saptenarian (4), Manila's Style (10), Sun Chaser (6), Raise A Dancer (9)

Race 13—(Super6/Qrt/Tri)—My Seikh/Pivotal (9), Prince Valiant (5), Magic Dancer (10), Ginja (2), Desert Breeze (1), Sincerity (4)

PICAA CHAMP: Scott Go and James Cafe, owners of Pacific Supertek–King's Bakeshop, hold the trophy with BAP secretary general Graham Lim and deputy commissioner Caloy Ramirez after winning the 2006 Picaa Open basketball tournament over Koi Village 88-82 at La Consolacion College gym in Mendiola, Manila, recently.

Gensan boxers rule Pacman tilt

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—HOST team General Santos City won five of the 10 gold medals at stake to emerge overall champion in the first Manny "Pacman" Pacquiao Cup National Amateur Boxing Championship recently at the Oval Plaza covered court here.

Antweight Aroel Romasasa beat Mandaluyong's Jerome Sarong, 4-1, in the 32-kilogram division to give Gensan its first gold. Roldan Bongcales (38 kg), Julito Purisima (40 kg), Saddam Barambagan (42 kg) and Noriel Nacionales (44 kg) won Gensan's other golds.

Bongcales overpowered Misamis' Elenger Abales, 5-0, and Purisima crushed Davao del Norte's Jerwin Ancajas. Barambagan showed too much power in stopping DN's Anthony Saron in 1:25 of the first round by a referree-stop-contest due to injury, while Nacionales nipped DN's Victorio Saludar III, 3-2.

The Gensan boxers also picked up two silvers and were rewarded with boxing equipment worth P50,000 plus a trophy awarded by Rey Golingan, president of the Amateur Boxing Association of the Phils. (Abap) Gensan chapter.

The Davao del Norte squad of Rep. Tony Boy Floirendo settled for first runner-up with four golds, three silvers and a bronze medal to bring home P10,000 worth of boxing equipment and a trophy.

DN's Mark Anthony Barriga (34 kg) outpointed Gensan's Larry Romares, 3-2. Rodel Rino (36 kg) overpowered South Cotabato's Ronie Diaros Jr., 4-1. Jonathan Tawan (46 kg) edged Davao City's Edwin Moralde, 3-2, while Jaime Quitoriano (51 kg) knocked out Davao City's Ali Brasharey Cali in the first round of a controversial final bout.

Cali claimed that he was hit by a low blow but referee Paulino Pitogo of Cebu and the jury declared the punch a legal blow.

North Cotabato of Gov. Manny Piñol finished with one gold courtesy of light-flyweight Romel Asenjo, who beat Gensan's Robert Gargaran in the 48-kg division, plus five bronze medals to place second runner-up.

Davao City went home with two silvers and a bronze to earn third runner-up honors followed by Misamis Oriental (0-1-1), Mandaluyong (0-1-0), Metro Dadiangas (0-0-2), Koronadal (0-0-1), Digos (0-0-1) and Iloilo (0-0-1). *Lito delos Reyes*

Christmas takes on deeper meaning for Heat's Wade

MIAMI—A KID JUMPED ATOP A PICnic table, threw his tiny arms in the air and let out a loud, delightful shriek.

"Here he comes!" yelled the boy, who couldn't have been older than 8 or 9.

With that, the 250 or so underprivileged kids crammed in the back of a South Florida arcade began stampeding toward the guest of honor. Their tiny hands smudged the windows he walked by on his way to greet them, and they all began screaming indistinguishably as he neared the entrance.

Later, when asked what he thought of the tiny mob, Dwyane Wade shook his head and laughed.

"That was cool," Wade said. "Crazy. It's something that's very special to me.

The Miami Heat guard is an NBA champion, a finals MVP for his work against the Dallas Mavericks last June, a multimillionaire, and one of US sport's most recognizable faces.

Yet he still marvels about making kids yell when he shows up to throw a Christmas party.

"See, to us, this is what the holidays are about now," says Siohvaughn Wade, Dwyane's wife. It used to be different.

The Wades would do what just about everyone else does on Christmas morning: Wake up early, rush to the tree and start ripping into the pile of wrapped boxes.

That was before they could afford to give themselves whatever they wanted.

$63 million

These days, with Wade in the final year of his first NBA contract—one paying him $3.84 million this season—and less than a year away from entering a new deal that should pay him somewhere in the range of $63 million over the next four seasons, money is no longer a concern.

So how many elaborate gifts are awaiting Wade on this Christmas, when he'll lead his Miami Heat against fellow superstar guard Kobe Bryant and the Los Angeles Lakers? Apparently, none.

"People like us 'get' all the time," Siohvaughn Wade says. "Constantly getting, constantly buying stuff, always getting something for free. So for the last three or four years, we haven't done the thing where we set a bunch of presents under a tree. We don't feel like there's a need anymore. Now, to be honest, we just give."

Wade arranged for his Converse shoes and brand of clothing to be distributed on Saturday at his mother's place of worship, the New Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church in southwest Chicago, and soon he will be sending another 100 pairs of kids' sneakers to the same church for another giveaway.

He's sent shoes to soldiers in Iraq, and to people struggling after Hurricane Katrina.

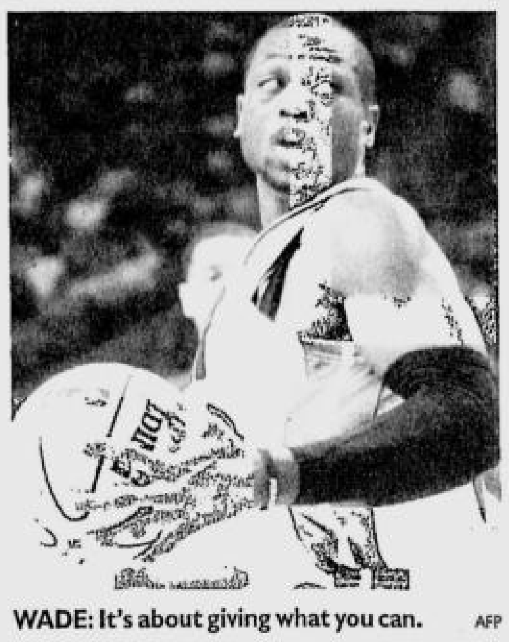
He's helped others privately and, truthfully, he'd rather do it all without fanfare.

Giving presents

"It's about giving. That's what Christmas means to me more so than anything," Wade says. "It's not just giving presents, giving certain gifts. It's about giving what you can. For me and my family, it's about giving love, about giving cheers, about giving joy, putting smiles on kids' faces because they're the future. Hopefully, when they get older, they'll pass it on and it'll keep going down the line."

This holiday is a pretty important work day for Wade, too.

His Heat—still without Shaquille O'Neal—are floundering, yet are only 3 1/2 games out of first place in the Southeast Division with a 12-14 record. *AP*



WADE: It's about giving what you can. AFP

Seahawks, Patriots top respective divisions

NEW YORK—THE NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS can begin thinking about a fourth Super Bowl in six years after clinching the AFC East division on Sunday.

The Seattle Seahawks also got into the playoffs, securing the NFC West. The big difference: New England won and the Seahawks were stunned in the final minute by the San Diego Chargers.

The Patriots (11-4) dealt the Jacksonville Jaguars' playoff hopes a severe blow with a 24-21 victory that earned them a fourth straight division title. They can't have a bye in the first round of the playoffs, however.

"We've accomplished something now," said linebacker Tedy Bruschi while he donned a championship hat and T-shirt. "It's our first goal. We can look at it as a positive for the next couple of days. The first thing you have to do is to win the division and then go from there."

Who knows how far the Seahawks (8-7) will go in the playoffs, considering how poorly they are playing. Seattle, the defending NFC champion, lost its third straight game when the Chargers' Philip Rivers found Vincent Jackson alone in the end zone for a 37-yard touchdown pass with 29 seconds left.

The 20-17 win was San Diego's ninth straight and the Chargers (13-2) clinched a first-round bye.

"This doesn't have to be a morgue," Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren said. "To be honest with you, I am more on the upbeat side than the downbeat side. That's a good football team, the Chargers... There were a lot of good things that happened today. I'll take it."

Cowboys

The Patriots and Seahawks joined the Dallas Cowboys, Baltimore Ravens, Chicago Bears, New Orleans Saints, San Diego and Indianapolis Colts with playoff berths. The Ravens own the AFC North crown, while the Bears have the NFC North—and home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs—the Saints the NFC South, and the Colts the AFC South.

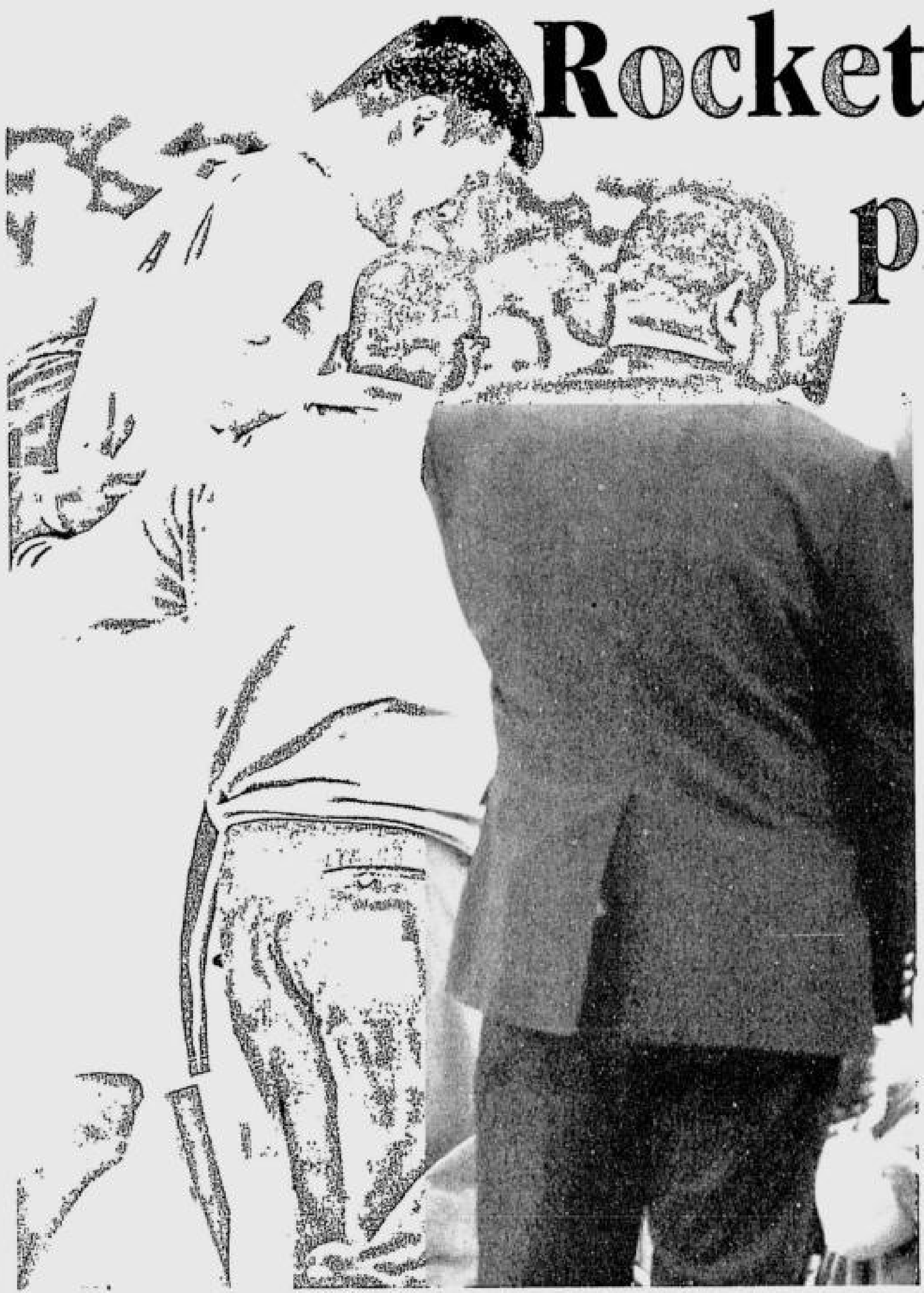
The Cowboys can clinch the NFC East by beating the Philadelphia Eagles on Monday, but Philadelphia grabs a playoff spot by beating Dallas.

Defending Super Bowl champion Pittsburgh (7-8) won't be back in the postseason after losing 31-7 to the Ravens. Also eliminated on Sunday were San Francisco with a 26-20 defeat to Arizona, and Buffalo, edged 30-29 by Tennessee.

Both wild-card spots in each conference remained uncertain after Sunday's games, although Philadelphia (8-6) has the inside track for an NFC berth and Denver (9-6) is in the best shape in the AFC.

In the NFC, Carolina, Atlanta, Green Bay, St. Louis and the New York Giants all are 7-8 and alive. For now, the Giants have the tiebreaker advantage despite losing six of seven games, including 30-7 to the Saints on Sunday. *AP*

Rockets face major problem with Yao's injury



YAO MING gets help off the court, leaving the Rockets without their main man at the middle. AP

HOUSTON, TEXAS—YAO MING'S BROKEN right leg means the Houston Rockets face a major battle to keep what has been a promising season on track.

In the first quarter of a Saturday loss to the Los Angeles Clippers, the star Chinese center suffered a fracture on the front of his right anteria tibia, a weight-bearing spot where the knee connects to the legbone.

Yao will be sidelined for at least six weeks and could miss more time if surgery is required.

Team officials were hopeful that no operation would be needed but said they could only wait and see how rest affects the break.

"Six weeks minimum. That means it could be more," Rockets guard Rafer Alston told the Houston Chronicle. "You're talking about a guy on a MVP pace that has been carrying this team the past two seasons.

"To hear that, it hurts."

Yao, 26, was in the midst of his finest NBA season, averaging 26.8 points and 9.7 rebounds a game.

When star guard Tracy McGrady was sidelined by back spasms seven games ago, Yao stepped up and became an aggressive, dominating leader.

Now he will need a strong rehabilitation effort to have any hope at regaining his superstar form. But should his teammates build upon the club's 16-11 start, he could yet have the chance to lead the Rockets in the playoffs.

The injury came when Clippers forward Tim Thomas drove to the basket and Yao and teammate Chuck Hayes moved to block the shot. Thomas ran into Hayes and both hit Yao, sending him to the floor in pain.

If the prognosis is correct, Yao will miss at least 18 games and return in early February, possibly in time to play in the NBA All-Star Game. Voters have elected him a starter in his first four NBA seasons.

Yao missed 21 games last season with a big toe injury and four more with a broken left foot. *AFP*

Asian golf comes of age with world success

SINGAPORE—ASIAN GOLF CAME OF age this year with the success for Asian Tour players around the world and increasing numbers of top-name stars attracted by what the region has to offer.

Asia hosted no fewer than nine European-sanctioned events, with the Tour enjoying another season of stellar growth.

Tiger Woods again headlined the $5-million HSBC Champions tournament, Asia's richest event held in China where the golf boom continues apace.

Top-ranked players such as Ernie Els, Retief Goosen, Adam Scott, Colin Montgomerie, Paul Casey and Jim Furyk all came to Asia as the trickle of big names turned into a flood.

Scott won back-to-back titles at the lucrative Singapore Open, outlasting Els in a play-off, while Goosen lifted the Volkswagen Masters trophy.

But the shock of the year was South Korea's Yang Yong-eun securing his biggest career victory by holding off Woods and a host of big names to clinch the showpiece HSBC Champions.

THAI Thongchai Jaidee (left) and Indian Jeev Milkha Singh: Asia's current stars. AFP

Other Asians also got in on the act, with Mardan Mamat of Singapore winning the Singapore Masters and Charlie Wi of South Korea taking the Malaysian Open—both European-sanctioned events.

And Asian stalwart Thongchai Jaidee secured a first top-10 in a World Golf Championship event at the American Express Championship in Ireland.

The name to emerge in 2006 though was Jeev Milkha Singh, who masterfully compiled four victories across three Tours while securing the Asian Tour's Order of Merit title.

Mired in the middle of a seven-year winless streak early in the year, the Indian seemed destined for another year of frustration as injury again overtook ability.

However, despite being in 319th position on the world ranking and coming off three missed cuts in four weeks heading into April, victory at the Volvo China Open set a magical season in motion.

More than a dozen top 10 finishes in Asia, Japan and Europe followed through the summer and beyond, before a victory at the European Tour's season-ending Volvo Masters truly grabbed the world's attention.

He broke into the world's top 50, ending the year at 47.

It was also a year that saw APGA chief executive Louis Martin, who helped shape the current Tour, depart to pursue golf course design opportunities with Els.

Kyi Hla Han, Executive Chairman of the Asian Tour, assumed his responsibilities and was buoyed by another successful golfing year.

"We are delighted with how our players have performed this season, both at home and abroad," he said. *AFP*

Boxer with bruising style a pound-for-pound prospect

MIGUEL COTTO (left) fires a shot at Granluca Branco. COTTO WEBSITE

NEW YORK—SOME ADVICE FOR young, promising fighters: Avoid getting in the ring with Miguel Cotto. It could be hazardous to one's career.

Cotto is a 26-year-old Puerto Rican who delivers vicious body punches and nasty hooks. His latest victory came Dec. 2 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, where he pummeled tough welterweight Carlos Quintana and won in five rounds.

The victory gave Cotto a second world title and his first million-dollar payday. It also was considered his coming-of-age moment.

Now, Cotto (28-0, 23 KOs) is hoping to cash in, with the goal of one day supplanting Floyd Mayweather as boxing's best pound-for-pound fighter.

"All the good boxers, I know I can fight with them," Cotto said in an interview from his home in Caguas, Puerto Rico. "I know I can beat them. I have no doubts."

Cotto doesn't like to simply beat opponents, he likes to destroy them. But he is modest and soft-spoken, going about his work without the hyperbolic rhetoric of a Bernard Hopkins or James Toney.

"I don't like to talk ," said Cotto, who starting boxing at age 11 to lose weight.

Cotto fights with a punishing style that disfigures the faces of foes. He declines to compare himself to any one boxer, although his relentless ring stalking and trademark body shots make him more Tony Zale than Marvin Hagler.

Like Zale, a middleweight champion in the 1940s, Cotto prefers attacking the body. He's knocked out about a half dozen fighters digging to the body like a backhoe.

He has dispatched everybody in front of him in a stretch of impressive wins over the previous two years. But Cotto points to three recent victories that have helped him mature into a seasoned boxer.

Against Ricard Torres last year, Cotto was knocked down and staggered but recovered to win when the fight was stopped in the seventh.

"I had two or three bad moments," Cotto said. "I survived and won the fight."

In June, he beat the loquacious and speedy Paulie Malignaggi of Brooklyn. Cotto said he had to tune out Malignaggi, who tried to distract him with verbal jabs.

"I had to keep my focus," Cotto said.

Malignaggi managed to go all 12 rounds but Cotto easily outpointed him and fractured the undefeated fighter's face, sending him to the hospital. Malignaggi said Cotto was the hardest puncher he ever faced.

His last fight against Quintana, a fellow Puerto Rican and left-hander, was risky. Cotto moved up to 147 pounds to battle Quintana for the WBA welterweight title. *AP*

RP better brace for Thais' ire, says Keon

By Marc Anthony Reyes

THE PHILIPPINES BETTER BRACE ITSELF FOR THAILAND'S WRATH in next year's Southeast Asian Games in Bangkok and other key cities.

KEON

Former Gintong Alay director Mike Keon made the unsolicited advice yesterday based on the finish of the SEAG nations during the recent Doha Asian Games.

"For sure they (the Thais) will be getting back at us," said Keon, who helped the country achieved its first SEAG overall title last year over Thailand in his capacity as national training director.

He said Thailand, the top SEAG nation in the Asiad, is expected to pull out all stops to wrest the overall crown from the Philippines.

Keon also warned of hometown decisions, which the Thais ironically complained about against the Filipinos during last year's SEAG in Manila.

The Thais underscored its status as the SEAG's strongest bets when they finished fifth overall in the recent Asiad.

They won 13 gold medals on top of 15 silvers and 26 bronzes and were overshadowed only by runaway winner China, Korea, Japan and Kazakhstan.

In comparison, the Philippines wound up 18th among 45 Asiad countries with a gold-silver-bronze harvest of 4-6-9. The Filipinos only ranked fourth among the SEAG nations, finishing behind Malaysia (9-17-17) and Singapore (8-7-12).

However, Keon said there is no pressing need to retain the SEAG overall title but "at least maintain our standard and finish second or third."

He added that there is a need to identify the sports the country must focus on, a factor which Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore have successfully done.

In the Asiad, Thailand improved its medal haul by dominating sepak takraw where it won four golds alone. That served as buffer for the lone gold the Thais snatch in boxing where they have scored well in the past.

The Thais also captured two golds in track and field with their known expertise in the relays. They also won one gold each in badminton, body building, English billiards, sailing, tennis and weightlifting.

Asiad 11th placer Malaysia racked up three golds in bowling, two in squash, added a gold apiece in badminton, sailing and wushu.

Singapore finished 12th overall by shining in sailing with five gold medals aside from golds in body building, bowling and swimming.

The Philippines delivered in boxing with two golds and came up with expected victories in wushu and billiards.

Toyota Otis Sparks prepare to sparkle

SLAM dunk king Rey Guevarra is a vital cog for the Sparks. ERIK ARAZAS

By Jasmine W. Payo

GAMES ON JAN. 6
(Olivarez College Sports Center)
2 p.m.—Mall & More vs Kettle Korn
4 p.m.—Hapee-PCU vs H. Centre

THEIR NEXT GAME MAY STILL be two weeks away, but the Toyota Otis Sparks will soon be back on the hardcourt.

Running fourth in the PBL Silver Cup, the Sparks will try to keep their focus even during the holiday break.

"While the others are on vacation, we're going to practice," said Toyota Otis coach Louie Alas yesterday. "We want to have that extra mile."

Having one of the smallest lineups in the league, Alas knows the Sparks still have a lot of holes to plug in their overall makeup.

"We have to work on the consistency of the team," he said.

But the Sparks, tagged as longshots in this conference, have already exceeded modest their expectations. The young squad surprisingly maintained its competitive form even with the departure of last conference's Most Valuable Player Joe Devance, the Fil-Am who towed Toyota Otis to a runner-up finish in the Unity Cup.

Banking on speed, the Sparks had been turning to their backcourt led by Marvin Cruz and Patrick Cabahug.

Low-key forward Dennis Daa had also been coming in strong lately, scoring in double figures in the Sparks' last four outings for a team-high 13.14 points per game.

"We have to use our quickness; our outside shooting also plays a crucial role," said Alas.

Cruz, a recruit from the disbanded Granny Goose, had emerged as the Sparks' new go-to guy.

Cruz, who had bailed out the team quite a number of times, averages 11.14 points, 3.1 assists and 1.6 steals for the Sparks.

But Alas believes the Sparks can benefit a lot more from the 5-foot-8 point guard. "He can do better than that," noted Alas.

Last week, Cruz again came to the fore by drilling in 20 points to lead the Sparks to a 90-81 triumph over the Magnolia Spinners.

The Sparks joined the TeleTech Titans and the Harbour Centre Port Masters at 4-3, still within striking distance of league-leader Henkel Sista's record of 6-2 and the 5-2 second-running slates of Mail and More and Hapee-PCU.

Checkmate chess registration today

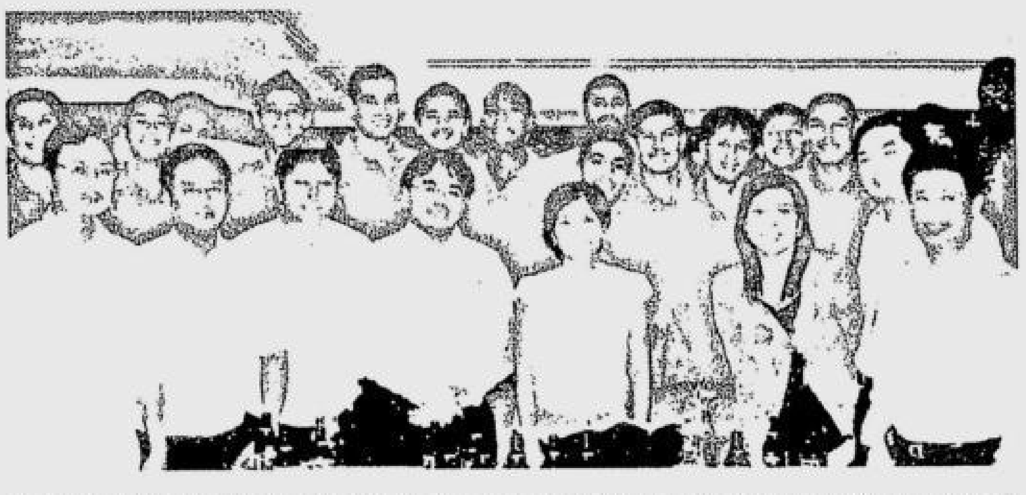
A SECOND BATCH OF ENROLLEES FOR THE Milo Checkmate holiday chess clinic will be accepted until 10:30 a.m. today at the lower 2F of St. Francis Square behind SM Megamall in Mandaluyong City.

The clinic is open to kids 5 years old and above. It aims to develop their chess talents into masters strength level through formal and systematic method of teachings.

The clinic will also serve as preparation for the qualifying tournaments in the selection of 2007 US and Asia-bound Milo Checkmate team. The first and second elimination tourneys are set on Dec. 29-30 and Jan. 3-4.

For details, call 8268560 and 0916-852-1069.

Meanwhile, the Pamaskong Handog of MCC 2000 below active chess tourney reels off on Dec. 30 at the same venue.



COURTESY CALL: The San Miguel Beermen, taking a break from their Philippine Basketball Association schedule, pay a courtesy call on new SMB division president Carlos Antonio Berba and other top executives recently at the SMC head office. With them are Art Bayona, AVP-Philippine finance operations; Jimbo Aronas, AVP-SMBD marketing; Joey de Guzman, VP-national sales operations; Berba; Mercy Marie Aguilar, chief finance officer; Herci Reyes, AVP-SMBD international finance operations; Alberto Rivera, VP-brewing technology group; and Rene Ceniza, AVP-national logistics manager.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER TV GUIDE
tuesday, December 26, 2006

ABC Christmas iba!

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Channel	2:30PM	3:00PM	3:30PM	4:00PM	4:30PM	5:00PM	5:30PM	6:00PM	6:30PM	7:00PM	7:30PM	8:00PM	8:30PM	9:00PM	9:30PM	10:00PM	10:30PM	11:00PM	11:30PM
ABC 5	Nickelodeon				TNA Wrestling		Metro		Big News	Ult Guinness World Records		Todo Max		Wow Maling-Mali Bytes	Sento	ALI		Araw-Araw Premyo Sa Pasko	Simbang Gabi
ABS-CBN 2	Kapamilya Cinema				Inocente De Ti	Yu-Gi-Oh GX	Beet The Vandel Buster	Pangako Sa 'Yo	TV Patrol World		Kapamilya Deal Or No Deal	Super Inggo (8:15 PM)		Maging Sino Ka Man	Princess Hours		Bandila	Correspondents	Mirada De Mujer
AXN		House (Season II)		30 Seconds To Fame	Ultimate Fighter (Season II)			Ripley's Believe It or Not		The 4400 (Season 2)		The Amazing Race Asia		Supernatural (Season I)		Las Vegas (Season 2)		Numb3rs (Season 2)	
bTV	FIBA World Basketball	TV Shopping		NBA: Lakers @ Heat					NBA Greatest Game w/ Michael Jordan				NBA Live	NBA Fantasy Hoops	NBA: Lakers @ Heat				
Cartoon Network																	Aqua Teen Hunger Force		
Cinema One		Snow Queen				Ina ka Ng Anak Mo				Bouz Of U				Muling Ibalik Ang Tamis Ng Pag-ibig				Forever My Love	
Cinemax			The Eddy Duchin Story (3:25PM)				Blind Justice			Wilder Napalm				The Flash				Judicial Consent	
CNN		Business International		World News	World Sport	Larry King Live		Business International	World Sport	World News Asia		World News	World Sport	World News Asia	World News Asia	Your World Today			
Crime/Suspense		Dominick Dunne's Power, Privilege & Justice		Law and Order: Special Victims Unit + 24		Profiler		Investigative Reports		Law and Order		Law and Order: Special Victims Unit + 24		The Closer		E-Ring		Oz	
Discovery Channel		I Shouldn't Be Alive		Rides		Egypt's New Tomb Revealed		Perfect Disaster		Wild Discovery		Hour Asia		Da Vinci Declassified		Perfect Disaster		Asian Enigma	
Disney Channel	Mr. Bean: The Animated Series	Totally Spies	Ad Attack/Untalkative Bunny	Mickey Mouseworks	Lilo & Stitch	Emperor's New School	Totally Spies	Kim Possible	Mr. Bean: The Animated Series	That's So Raven	Wonderful World Of Disney			Wicked Science/ Hannah Montana	Hannah Montana	Buzz On Maggie	Totally Spies	Wonderful World Of Disney	
ESPN		English Premier League Highlights		Asian Cup Table Tennis '06				NFL Football: Eagles @ Cowboys						Sportscenter Asia	Pro Billiards '06		Pro Billiards '06		Sportscenter Asia
ETC	Rated Oh! 6	Project Runway 2		Change of Heart	Elimidate	Blind Date	Fifth Wheel	Seinfeld	Ambush Makeover	The Tyra Banks Show		One Tree Hill 3		The OC Season 3		Entertainment Tonight	The Insider	The Tonight Show With Jay Leno	
ETC 2nd Avenue		Starting Over		The Maury Povich Show		The Jerry Springer Show		Dr. Phil		NBC Nightly News	The Inside Edition	The Ellen (Degeneres) Show		Wheel Of Fortune	Jeopardy	Blow Out 2		NBC Nightly News	The Inside Edition
Fox News		Hannity & Colmes		On The Record With Greta Van Susteren		The O'Reilly Factor		Your World With Neil Cavuto		Fox & Friends						Fox News Live			
GMA 7	Makita Ka Lang Muli	Kapuso Movie Festival				Ghost Fighter	Jewel In The Palace		24 Oras	Captain Barbell	Atlantika	StarStruck: The Next Level	Bakekang	A Rosy Life (9:15 PM)		Bahay Mo Ba 'To?		Saksi	
Hallmark Channel				Judging Amy		Just Cause		McLeod's Daughters		Strong Medicine		Family Law		Judging Amy					
HBO			The Adventures Of Shark Boy And Lava Girl				If Looks Could Kill			Hitch				The Aftermath Part 1			The Aftermath Part 2 (10:40PM)		
Hero TV	Class Of The Titans	Sunny Pig	Inuyasha III	Mirmo de Pon	Saiyuki Reload	Naruto	Monkey Turn	Gundam Seed Destiny	Full Metal Panic	Galaxy Angels	Voltes V Evolution	Inuyasha III	Mirmo de Pon	Astroboy	Three-Eyed One	Naruto	Combattler V	Class Of The Titans	Yu-Gi-Oh GX
IBC 13		EZ Shop				Serbis On The Go	IBC Express Balita	Pangarap Kong Jackpot		EBC Earth Files		Japan Video Topics/ Arms		Travel Philippines	Japan Video Topics/ Arms	EBC Earth Files	IBC News Tonite	Home Shopping Network	
JackTV		Experience		Heat		X-Men Evolution	Justice League	Botomline		Mad TV		Just For Laughs	Jamie Kennedy Experiment	My Name Is Earl	Always Sunny In Philadelphia	The Daily Show With Jon Stewart	Comedy Central	The Late Show David Letterman	
Lifestyle Network	Design Remix	Wolfgang Puck	My Country, My Kitchen	Rachel Ray		Sensible Chic	At Home With	Food 911	Boy Meets Grill	Martha		E! News Weekend		Rachel Ray		Whose Wedding Is It Anyway?		Napa Style	Shiela Bridges Designer Living
MTV Philippines		Sessions Salamin	VH1 Fabulous Life: The Fab 40 pt2		Pimp My Ride	Cribs	MTV Hits	Rockista on MTV	MTV Hits	Get Spotted	5 Things About Salamin	TRL		Pimp My Ride	Cribs	Summerbreak Sessions: Sugarfree	Sessions Salamin	VH1 Fabulous Life Celeb Vacation Homes	
MYX		Rock MYX	My MYX	Mellow MYX	Urban MYX	Take 5	MYX Versions	MYX Firsts	Star MYX	OPM MYX	Pop MYX	MYX Daily Top Ten		MYXellaneous	Radio MYX	MYX News	My MYX	MYX Backtrax	MYXilog
National Geographic		Nat'l Geographic Specials		Catastrophe		Mad Labs	Mad Labs	Top 5		Nat'l Geographic Specials		WOW!		Mad Labs	Mad Labs	Air Crash Investigation		Hunter Hunted	
NBN					Dyos Ko, Mahal Mo Ba Sila?	Teledyaryo W/ Rey Langit & Angelique Lazo		Tinig Ng Bayan		Talakayan Sa Isyung Pulis		Teledyaryo Final Edition		World Pool Championship					
Net 25	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	In Focus	Euromaxx	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Tamang Daan		News Beat (Live)		OpenLine Live	Gabay Sa Kalusugan	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Pagbubunyag		World Report	In Focus	DWTV Journal News	Euromaxx
Nickelodeon	Chalkzone	The Fairly Odd Parents	SpongeBob SquarePants	Naturally Sadie	Romeo	SpongeBob SquarePants	My Life As A Teenage Robot	Danny Phantom	The Adventures Jimmy Neutron	The Fairly Odd Parents	Drake & Josh	Unfabulous	SpongeBob SquarePants	The Fairly Odd Parents	All That	Romeo	As Told By Ginger	My Dad The Rock Star	
PBO			Sa Kabila Ng Lahat				Daddy Na Si Chito				Nandito Ako				Ikaw		[illegible]		
Qtv	Pawnshop No. 8	Samurai X	Hikaru No Go	The Prince Of Tennis	MMS (My Music Station)		Moms		Winter Sonata	Irene	Emperor Of The Sea	Takeshi's Castle	Extreme Makeover: Home Edition		News On Q	Sana'y Muling Makapiling		Irene	Acts
RPN 9	TV Shopping	Golf Power		Fistorama	Mr. Fighting	RPN Aksyon Balita		Complete Savages	Jake In Progress	Project Runway		Australia's Next Top Model		Good Girls Don't	Sex & the City	Newswatch Now	Tuesday Night Treat		
SBN 21								Sony Music Video				Oras Ng Himala		Oras ng Katotohanan		Sony Music Video		Sony Music Video	
Solar Sports				FIG Gymnastics				Billiards: US 9 Ball		Superfights or Stars of Future				ITZ		Sportsdesk		Raceworld	
Star Movies	Alexander						Blubber (5:20PM)			Mr. And Mrs. Smith (6:55PM)				Star Wars Episode I - Phantom Menace				American Pie 2 (11:15PM)	
Star World	Becker	The Bold & The Beautiful		General Hospital		Desire: Table For Three		The Simpsons	Malcolm In The Middle	Star News Asia	Seinfeld	One Tree Hill		Desperate Housewives		Desire: Table For Three		Seinfeld	One Tree Hill
Studio 23								Blog	Pinoy Dream Academy	Wazzup Wazzup	Gilmore Girls	Smallville (8:15 PM)		24		News Central	Oprah (10:45PM)		MYXilog
UnTV				KNC Show	Kakampi Mo Ang Batas		Kaka at Ciara Kaagapay Nyo		Public Hearing	Make My Day		Ang Dating Daan (8:15PM)							

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Peso seen breaching 48 to $1 in early '07

Singapore bank sees dollar weakening vs Asian currencies

By Doris C. Dumlao

DEVELOPMENT BANK OF SINGAPORE SEES THE PESO BREAKing into the 48 level against the dollar early next year and further to 47 in the second semester despite market jitters over the May elections and fears of a rate cut by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

"We like the peso, but expect volatility with the May 2007 elections," DBS said in its economics markets strategy recommendation for the first quarter of 2007.

"Appreciation will rely more on inflows with the central bank cutting rates in 2007," it said.

Any monetary easing which results in lower yields on peso-denominated assets usually makes the local currency less attractive for investors.

DBS said it expected the BSP to trim its key policy rates twice next year--by 25 basis points in the first quarter and again in the second quarter of 2007, bringing down the overnight borrowing rate to 7 percent from the current 7.5 percent.

"Monetary policy should help support domestic demand," DBS said, projecting that the country could sustain a growth in gross domestic product of 5.5 percent next year.

GDP, the single most important economic indicator, refers to the total amount of goods and services produced by the economy in a given period.

Alongside the projected appreciation of most Asian currencies, the peso is seen to hit 48.50:$1 in the first quarter and 48.20 in the second quarter before further climbing to 47.80 in the third quarter and 47.50 in the fourth quarter.

But while the peso and Asian currencies are seen rising further, the outlook remains bleak for the dollar.

"We expect the dollar to continue softening--dollar fatigue again, as the Fed (Federal Reserve or the US central bank) cuts rate twice during the second half of 2007," DBS said.

The yen, whose movement influences other Asian currencies, is also seen to spike higher with projected monetary tightening by the central bank in Asia's wealthiest nation and the world's second biggest economy.

"The yen has the greatest potential to outperform in 2007. Japan is the only G3 country where a steady stream of rate hikes is expect-

PESO SEEN/ B2

Myanmar, Cambodia invite PNOC to join oil, gas search

By Abigail L. Ho

THE STATE-OWNED PHILIPpine National Oil Co. has been invited by the national oil firms in Myanmar and Cambodia to conduct oil and gas exploration in their countries.

PNOC Officer-in-Charge Pedro Aquino Jr. said the state firm was considering taking its Cambodian and Myanmar counterparts up on their invitations as the prospects in those two countries were relatively good.

"There are very high chances of getting oil and gas there," he said.

During a recent meeting among heads of national oil companies in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus China, Japan and Korea, Cambodia National Petroleum said it was open to collaboration and cooperation with its counterparts in the region for the development of oil and gas fields in Cambodia.

Apart from those in Cambodia and Myanmar, other national oil companies that wanted to partner with their counterparts in the region were China National Offshore Oil Corp. (CNOOC), Singapore Petroleum Corp. (SPC), Petro Vietnam and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT).

Aquino said that CNOOC was now exploring various business opportunities within the Asean region, inviting national oil companies to farm-in in service contract areas outside China.

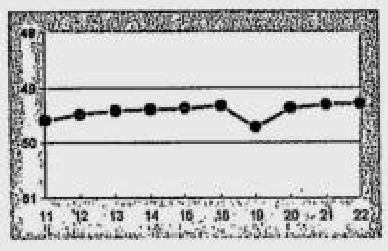
SPC, which already had interests in service areas in Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Indonesia, committed participation in other service areas for oil and gas development, he said.

Petro Vietnam said it was

MYANMAR/ B2

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES



DECEMBER

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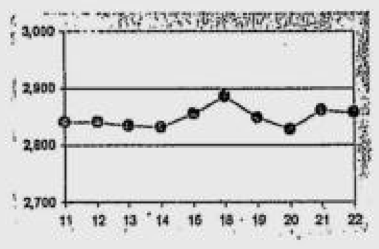
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 22, 2006

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B2)

See Market Play on Page B2

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SMIC plans to put up new firm

Company to handle SM's tourism ventures in '07

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

SM INVESTMENTS CORP. (SMIC), the flagship firm of mall tycoon Henry Sy, is studying the possibility of forming a new company that will hold the group's investments in resort development and tourism and help bankroll its P2.5 billion to P3 billion capital expenditure for tourism-related projects next year.

SMIC chief finance officer Jose Sio said the flagship firm may decide on the plan early next year as the conglomerate wants to fully prepare a solid brand for its tourism forays.

Among SMIC's current tourism-related ventures are the ones with Highlands Prime Inc. in Tagaytay, and Hamilo Coast in Nasugbu, Batangas, Sio said.

He added it was still early to tell whether these investments could be folded into one subsidiary.

At the moment, SMIC's real estate development and tourism interests are under SM Development Corp., the unit that develops residential condominiums in and around SM malls.

SMDC's projects include Chateau Elysee, a residential project in Parañaque City, and Mezza Residences, a high-rise residential and commercial building in Sta. Mesa.

In June, SMIC said it was positioning itself to take advantage of the expected upswing in the property sector through the creation of a new division that would focus solely on this area.

In a disclosure, SMIC said it has organized the SM Investments Property Group to map out the direction, and implement the conglomerate's plan to seize leadership across three business fronts: Residential and condominium development, commercial development and leisure, and tourism.

The property group is headed by SMIC vice chair Henry T. Sy Jr., who will serve as its managing director.

For its long-term venture into leisure and tourism development, SMIC is embarking on the large-scale development of Hamilo Coast, a 5,700-hectare terrain, comprising 13 coves along the coast of the South China Sea.

A two-hour drive away from Metro Manila with the completion of a highway link, the seaside property in Nasugbu, Batangas is positioned to become the country's premier leisure destination.

The conglomerate's venture into leisure and tourism is aimed at tapping the projected increase in tourist arrivals in the country, and rides on the government's strategy to position the Philippines as one of Asia's leading tourist destinations.

The property group's tourism development and other property projects are expected to become important contributors to SM Investments' profit growth over the next few years.

Bull run seen to go on until yearend

WITH THE TRADING WEEK shortened due to the holidays, analysts are still optimistic that the stock market will continue its bull run until the end of the year, prompted on by the traditional Yuletide "window dressing."

Window dressing refers to the selling of weak performing stocks by money managers just before the end of each reporting quarter so that a particular portfolio does not appear to be heavy on these types of stocks. This is accompanied by buying of strong performing stocks.

"But we should see more positioning nest week even when most investors are on a holiday break," said Astro del Castillo, managing director of investment firm First Grade Holdings. "We're optimistic about a Santa Claus rally. It may not be as spectacular as this week's, but the reindeers will keep running."

The Philippine Stock Exchange is closed today to mark the holidays.

AB Capital Securities said that the conduct of window dressing was evident on Friday in some key blue chips, such as Ayala Corp. but was offset by losses in telecommunications giant Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co.

AB Capital Securities said this reflected a somewhat lackluster appetite from investors.

"Going into a long weekend, investors were not their usual aggressive selves as they opted to stay on the sidelines," AB Capital Securities wrote in its weekly report. "Trading is expected to remain lackluster for the rest of the year. Bias could be positive as we should see some traditional year end positioning in quality blue chip issues. Volatility is low as compared to the average volatility over the past sessions. Support is at 2,800, while resistance is at 2,900."

Conrade Bate of online brokerage firm Citiseconline.Com said that next year, the stock index could hit 3,200, led by property, power and utility firms, and banks.

"The main drivers for next year will be strong corporate earnings, an appreciating peso, a low interest rate environment and government spending which will reflate assets and continue to spur economic activity domestically," Bate said.

The PSE index on Friday closed at 2,858.31. *Elizabeth L. Sanchez*

Task force to attract investments formed

By Ronnel W. Domingo

A TASK FORCE MANDATED TO help improve the country's competitiveness as an investment destination was recently formed, with both government and business leaders named to sit in the body.

According to the Philippine Exporters Confederation, key officials of which were named "private-sector champions" or representatives in the task force, the move meant that a coordinated national drive to improve the country's ability to compete in trade and in attracting investments could finally be taken up.

Created under Executive Order No. 571, the task force would be co-chaired by the Trade Secretary (currently, Peter B. Favila) and Cesar Bautista, himself a former trade secretary but this time representing the private sector.

Ambassadors Roberto Romulo and Donald Dee were also named as members while counterparts from the government would come from the departments of finance, transportation and education.

Six working groups were also created to operated under the task force, covering areas identified as needing improvements to make the country competitive.

These are human resources, efficient public and private sector management, effective access to financing, improved transaction flows and costs (minimizing red tape), seamless infrastructure network, and energy cost competitiveness and self sufficiency.

Lawyer Emerico de Guzman was appointed head of the working group on human resource; Baltazar Endriga on management; Sergio R. Ortiz-Luis Jr. on financing; David L. Balangue on transaction flows and costs; Meneleo Carlos on infrastructure, and Antonio del Rosario on energy.

Philexport said that in the national competitiveness summit held on Oct. 6, action agendas for all six areas that the task force will focus on were finalized.

Heads of different agencies in government also made specific commitments on what to do in improving the climate of doing business, including specific projects they will implement within a fixed deadline.

EO 571 aims at improving Philippine competitiveness by implementing this action agenda, with public-private sector partnership as an anchor.

DoE wants PNOC to have stake in contracts

By Abigail L. Ho

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY has formulated a draft circular requiring all winning bidders for petroleum blocks offered in the 2006 Philippine Energy Contracting Round (PECR 2006) to give Philippine National Oil Co. at least a 10-percent stake in the service contracts.

"We want to assure PNOC's participation in more service contracts. We need this for energy security," Energy Undersecretary Guillermo Balce said in a briefing. "We want the national oil company to have more oil assets."

He said that under the draft circular, PNOC would take a 10-percent stake in a service contract if the a winning bidder for one of the petroleum blocks under PECR 2006 already has a Filipino partner.

In the absence of a Filipino partner, however, he said the mandatory PNOC stake would go up to 15 percent.

When the circular is finally signed and issued, winning bidders for petroleum service contracts under the PECR 2006 would have no choice but to allow some form of government participation in the exploration and development of their contract areas.

This circular would only cover contracts awarded under the PECR 2006 and would not be retroactive, he said.

The DOE on Friday launched the PECR 2006, offering nine petroleum blocks, 14 coal prospects and three geothermal sites to prospective investors for exploration and development.

Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla said at least one investor had expressed interest to bid for each of the nine oil and gas areas that were placed on the auction block.

Balce said interested bidders could submit their proposals within the first quarter of next year, with awards to take place by June.

For oil and gas exploration, the DOE has identified nine areas spanning 71,357.3 square kilometers for development, including Cagayan, Central Luzon, two blocks in Mindoro-Cuyo, three blocks in East Palawan, Visayan Basin, and Agusan-Davao.

Philamlife reports 54% rise in Nov collections to ₱1.58B

By Doris C. Dumlao

PHILAMLIFE, THE COUNTRY'S largest life insurance company, reported a 54-percent growth in premium collections in November to P1.58 billion compared to a month ago.

Collection was driven by the brisk sale of new products.

In a press statement, the company reported that premiums from its new AIG Money Tree products alone had hit P473.22 million in a single month.

Philamlife also registered strong growth in its group life and personal accident lines, which were up 29 percent and 15 percent, respectively.

"We will continue to provide financial security to even more Filipinos in 2007," said Jose Cuisia Jr., Philamlife president and CEO.

Strong investor reception to Philamlife's variable life products, on the other hand, was attributed to the high yields of the insurance company's investment funds.

One-year returns as of Dec. 15 reached 18.7 percent for the fixed income fund, 36.91 percent for the equity fund, 19.74 percent for the dollar bond fund, and 12.36 percent for the global bond fund.

The company is also bullish over Philamlife's prospects in 2007—the year when the unit of the American Insurance Group will celebrate its 60th anniversary in the Philippines.

To kick off its diamond anniversary campaign, Philamlife recently introduced four new generation products:

- Philamlife Brilliance for education, which provides guaranteed education benefits and dividend potential for higher returns;
- Longevity for savings and protection, which offers guaranteed lifetime cash benefits every three years, guaranteed increasing insurance coverage plus potential returns from dividends.
- Abundance for investments, which combines investment and insurance in an easy-to-understand package that lets one participate in high-yielding investment funds; and,
- Leisure for retirement, which provides a continuous monthly pension that lets one enjoy his retirement in comfort and security.

Philamlife also launched the country's first prepaid accidence insurance card called "AKSITEXT," which can be activated through a mobile phone's short messaging system. It is now available in convenience stores for only P10 in premiums.

AKSITEXT provides P10,000 accidental death insurance coverage for a period of 15 days.

Peso seen . . .

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ed in 2007. The yen may shift from a funding currency to a reserve currency," DBS said.

"Interestingly, the currency hump forecast in US dollar is relevant to Asian currencies. The latter continue their modest appreciating trend versus the dollar," DBS said, noting that the Japanese yen and Chinese yuan were appreciating further even while another major global currency, the euro, was losing its firmness.

DBS thus called it "dollar fatigue"--which is related to fears of US Fed rate cuts and a protracted slowdown in the US economy. The bank also expected the now Democrat-led US House and Senate to put more pressure on China's "gradualist" approach to yuan flexibility.

"The yuan should appreciate at a 5-percent pace in 2007, a bit faster than its recent pace," DBS said.

Meanwhile, the Thai baht, which was Asia's best performing currency in 2006, would not likely get the same distinction in 2007, DBS said, projecting the currency to soften to 37.50:$1 by the fourth quarter.

Myanmar, Cambodia . . .

From page B1

willing to facilitate cooperation of national oil firms through joint projects, whether in Vietnam or in other places, according to Aquino.

PTT was also looking at areas beyond Thailand for oil and gas exploration and production, he said.

He said PNOC was open to the idea of conducting oil and gas exploration activities in other countries and that the state firm itself was also looking at partnerships with its counterparts in the region, but in the area of liquefied natural gas.

PNOC is seeking partners from the Asean+3 group for the construction of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in Bataan and two natural gas pipeline projects that have been sidelined for several years now.

Aquino invited national oil companies in the region to partner with PNOC in undertaking the LNG terminal project and the Batangas-Manila (BatMan-1) and Bataan-Manila (BatMan-2) natural gas pipelines.

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of December 22, 2006)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
FINANCIAL					
BANKS					
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	47.5	47.5	46.5	47	1,837,700
Bank of the Phil. Islands	62	62.5	61.5	62.5	2,481,500
China Banking Corp.	695	695	695	695	3,000
Citystate Savings Bank	19	19	19	19	400
Export and Ind. Bank A	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.47	2,290,000
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	84.5	84.5	84	84	132,700
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	51	51	50.5	51	1,312,500
Philippine National Bank	44	44	43.5	44	85,200
Phil. Savings Bank	48	48	48	48	2,000
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	26	26	25.5	25.5	109,000
Security Bank Corp.	66	66	66	66	146,200
Union Bank of the Phil.	49	49	49	49	1,400
OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS					
Atr Kimeng Fin. Corp.	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.96	23,000
Bankard Inc.	0.78	0.78	0.75	0.75	160,000
Citiseconline.Com Inc.	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.5	250,000
First Metro Invest. Corp	30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5	2,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1650	1650	1650	1650	350
Ivantage Corp.	1.54	1.6	1.54	1.6	4,277,000
INDUSTRIAL					
ELECTRICITY, ENERGY, POWER & WATER					
PNOC Energy Dev. Corp.	4.5	4.55	4.45	4.45	54,204,000
First Gen Corp.	55	55	54	54.5	1,362,600
First Phil Hldgs Corp	62.5	63.5	62.5	63	1,013,600
Manila Electric Co. A	54	54.5	53.5	54	210,000
Manila Electric Co. B	54	54.5	54	54.5	551,200
Manila Water Co. Inc.	9.5	9.5	9.4	9.5	4,162,000
Petron Corp.	4.1	4.15	4.1	4.1	3,780,000
East Asia Power Res. Corp	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	200,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	1.1	1.12	1.1	1.12	167,000
FOOD, BEVERAGE & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.6	23,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	21	21	21	21	10,800
Jollibee Foods Corp.	42	42	41.5	42	369,000
RFM Corp.	1	1	1	1	200,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	2.8	3.05	2.75	2.75	1,780,000
San Miguel Corp. A	67	67	66.5	67	44,300
San Miguel Corp. B	74.5	74.5	74	74	117,700
Alliance Tuna Int'l. Inc.	2.18	2.18	2.08	2.1	533,000
Universal Robina Corp.	18.75	18.75	18.75	18.75	5,211,200
CONSTRUCTION, INFRASTRUCTURE & ALLIED SERVICES					
Southeast Asian Cement	1.04	1.04	1	1	12,677,000
Engineering Equip. Inc.	3.15	3.2	3.15	3.15	811,000
Fortune Cement Corp.	2.65	2.65	2.65	2.65	4,000
Holcim Philippines Inc.	7.6	7.6	7.5	7.5	1,093,000
Phil Nat'l Const. Corp.	6.3	6.4	6.3	6.4	42,000
Republic Cement Corp.	3.95	3.95	3.9	3.9	185,000
CHEMICALS					
Chemrez Technologies Inc.	5.3	5.4	5.2	5.3	2,746,000
Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	0.62	0.62	0.62	0.62	10,000
DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS					
Geograce Res. Phil. Inc.	0.71	0.72	0.7	0.71	25,540,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.215	0.215	0.185	0.2	34,040,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.0085	0.0085	0.008	0.008	70,000,000
Ayala Corp.	515	540	510	540	436,270
Alsons Cons. Res. Inc.	0.68	0.74	0.67	0.67	5,450,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	6.9	7	6.9	6.9	632,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.0625	0.0625	0.06	0.06	44,400,000
A. Soriano Corp.	2.85	2.85	2.85	2.85	322,000
Apc Group Inc.	0.39	0.39	0.37	0.37	6,920,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	10,000,000
Anglo Phil Holdings Corp.	1.08	1.16	1.08	1.14	13,031,000
Atn Holdings Inc.	1.82	1.82	1.82	1.82	80,000
Baguio Gold Holdings Corp	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.3	83,000
Balabac Resources & Hldgs	1.14	1.14	1.1	1.1	27,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	9.3	9.3	9.3	9.3	55,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	2.22	2.22	2.2	2.2	2,294,000
Dmci Holdings Inc.	5.9	6	5.8	5.8	2,947,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	3.55	3.55	3.55	3.55	574,000
Forum Pacific Inc.	0.13	0.17	0.13	0.17	520,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	10	10.5	10	10.5	3,767,000
Keppel Holdings B	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	97,000
Mabuhay Holdings Corp.	0.34	0.34	0.34	0.34	20,000
Magnum Holdings Inc	4	4.1	3.9	3.95	73,000
Multitech Inv. Corp.	1.6	1.6	1.54	1.58	1,703,000
Pacifica	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	3,000,000
Prime Orion Phils. Inc.	0.2	0.205	0.19	0.19	1,500,000
Prime Media Holdings Inc.	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	60,000
Republic Glass Hldg. Corp	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	30,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.155	2,120,000
SM Investments Corp.	305	310	305	310	85,370
South China Resources Inc	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	190,000
Unioil Res. & Holdings Co	0.32	0.32	0.29	0.29	13,010,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	15.25	15.25	15.25	15.25	1,408,400
Araneta Properties Inc.	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	50,000
Belle Corp.	1.12	1.12	1.1	1.12	643,000
A Brown Company Inc.	1.66	1.66	1.56	1.6	506,000
Cityland Development Corp	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.6	10,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	3.2	3.25	3.15	3.15	216,000
C & P Homes Inc.	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	176,000
Cebu Prop. Vent. A	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	6,000
Cebu Prop. Vent B	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	50,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.32	0.32	0.31	0.31	7,310,000
Elb Realty Developers Inc	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	90,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.54	0.54	0.53	0.54	3,670,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.07	0.07	0.0625	0.0625	3,000,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	2	2	1.98	2	6,482,000
Gotesco Land Inc.	0.145	0.145	0.145	0.145	200,000
Gotesco Land Inc.B	0.145	0.16	0.135	0.135	870,000
Highlands Prime Inc.	2.5	2.9	2.5	2.9	160,000
Interport Res.	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	8,000,000
Interport Res. B	0.0085	0.009	0.0085	0.009	35,000,000
Keppel Phils. Prop. Inc.	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	2,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.48	0.48	0.45	0.45	1,070,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.64	0.64	0.63	0.64	1,000,000
Megaworld Corp.	2.3	2.3	2.26	2.28	10,288,000
Metro Pacific Inv. Corp.	5.1	6.4	5.1	5.4	2,683,000
Mrc Allied Ind. Inc.	0.39	0.4	0.38	0.38	1,750,000
Robinsons Land Corp.	15.5	15.5	15.25	15.25	707,300
Phil Realty and Holdings	0.68	0.68	0.65	0.66	11,020,000
Sm Development Corp.	2.5	2.55	2.5	2.5	800,000
Sm Prime Holdings Inc.	10	10.25	10	10.25	4,604,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.125	0.125	0.11	0.11	6,880,000
SERVICE					
MEDIA					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp	21	21	20.5	20.75	37,300
TELECOMMUNICATIONS					
Digital Telecom Phils Inc	1.92	1.94	1.88	1.92	11,080,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	1240	1240	1230	1230	8,110
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	6.6	6.6	6.5	6.6	4,052,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	2390	2395	2325	2325	223,260
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY					
Boulevard Holdings Inc.	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	1,470,000
Imperial Res.	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	23,200,000
Ionics Inc.	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	255,000
Ipvg Corp.	4.1	4.1	3.95	3.95	949,000
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.055	0.055	0.055	0.055	500,000
Ism Communications Corp.	0.0575	0.06	0.0575	0.06	10,100,000
Transpacific Broadband	4.15	4.15	2.8	2.8	2,933,000
Philweb Corp.	0.031	0.032	0.03	0.032	77,100,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.1	16,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	19	19.75	19	19.75	225,000
Lorenzo Shipping Corp.	1.28	1.28	1.26	1.26	81,000
HOTEL & LEISURE					
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	2.08	2.08	2.06	2.08	330,000
Philippine Racing Club	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	100,000
EDUCATION					
Centro Escolar University	9	9	9	9	6,000
Ipeople Inc.	3.05	3.05	3.05	3.05	336,000
DIVERSIFIED SERVICES					
Macroasia Corp.	2.12	2.12	2.08	2.08	377,000
Paxys Inc.	19	19.5	19	19.5	1,005,900
MINING					
Apex Mining Co. Inc. A	5.9	5.9	5.8	5.8	196,000
Apex Mining Co. Inc B	6	6	6	6	210,000
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.012	0.012	0.011	0.011	125,600,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	9.9	10	9.6	9.7	2,395,000
Dizon Copper Silver Mines	3.4	4	2.95	3.2	2,855,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	5,170,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.28	0.28	0.27	0.27	5,190,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.023	0.023	0.022	0.023	632,100,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.026	0.026	0.025	0.026	240,000,000
Omico Corp.	0.013	0.013	0.012	0.012	848,300,000
Philex Mining Corp.	4.1	4.1	3.95	4	9,747,000
Semirara Mining Corp.	18.75	18.75	18.75	18.75	92,300
United Paragon Mining Co.	0.75	0.75	0.72	0.75	2,180,000
Vulcan Ind'l	1.72	1.72	1.62	1.64	5,593,000
OIL					
Basic Petroleum Corp.	0.28	0.29	0.28	0.29	700,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	87,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	21,600,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	1	1	1	1	900,000
The Philodrill Corp. B	1	1	1	1	113,000
Petroenergy Res. Corp.	10	10	10	10	118,000

CURRENCIES

December 25, 2006 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.759013	1.000000	49.3920
Japan	Yen	0.006415	0.008452	0.4175
United Kingdom	Pound	1.488501	1.961100	96.8627
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.097625	0.128621	6.3528
Switzerland	Franc	0.623983	0.822098	40.6051
Canada	Dollar	0.657439	0.866176	42.7822
Singapore	Dollar	0.492994	0.649519	32.0810
Australia	Dollar	0.595351	0.784375	38.7419
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.013405	2.652661	131.0202
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.202404	0.266667	13.1712
Brunei	Dollar	0.491398	0.647417	31.9772
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000083	0.000110	0.0054
Thailand	Baht	0.020795	0.027397	1.3532
UAE	Dirham	0.206669	0.272287	13.4488
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.317500	65.0740
Korea	Won	0.000819	0.001079	0.0533
China	Yuan**	0.097098	0.127926	6.3185
Argentina	Peso	0.249061	0.328138	16.2074
Brazil	Real	0.351802	0.463499	22.8931
Denmark	Kroner	0.134134	0.176722	8.7287
India	Rupee	0.017053	0.022467	1.1097
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.214774	0.282965	13.9762
Mexico	New Peso	0.069894	0.092085	4.5483
New Zealand	Dollar	0.527753	0.695314	34.3429
Norway	Kroner	0.122637	0.161574	7.9805
Pakistan	Rupee	0.012463	0.016420	0.8110
South Africa	Rand	0.108485	0.142929	7.0595
Sweden	Kroner	0.111497	0.146897	7.2555
Syria	Pound	0.014622	0.019264	0.9515
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023318	0.030722	1.5174
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000354	0.000466	0.0230

Source: REUTERS' FOREX CLOSING PRICES as of NY Time Dec. 21, 2006

People, Events & Products

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Editor **Aries Espinosa**

Ginakit sails again

ELEGANTLY DECORATED BOATS called ginakit navigated again Dec. 19 the Rio Grande de Mindanao in an annual depiction of the coming of Shariff Kabunsuan.

On the culmination of a five-day-long festival named in honor of the man credited with establishing Islamic faith and culture in mainland Mindanao in the 14th century, the colorful and musical flotilla that has been the symbol of regal pomp will cap the fête recently adjudged by the Atop (Association of Tourism Officers of the Philippines) as Best Tourism Event in the Philippines (city category).

Already, 16 groups have expressed desire to participate in the Ginakit Fluvial Parade which has become a competition for the past three years. A ginakit must be made up of not less than four boats either joined together as one big boat or straddling each other while traversing from the mouth of the river up to the present-day city wharf.

Unesco Commissioner Bai Sandra Sema, also City Tourism Council Chair, said that with the national recognition gained by the Shariff Kabunsuan Festival, it has become more imperative to make this year's celebration "stylish, merry and always meaningful".

In keeping with such, regular features of the festival such as Kuyog Street Dancing and Inaul Fashion Show will be complemented by cultural events, a trade fair, civic-military parade, Grand Kanduli and the Festival of Lights. The latter is the newest feature of the celebration and will showcase lighting designs for the 10 tents to be set up by the Liga ng mga Barangay in the grounds of the New City Hall. The tents have been illuminated every night since Dec. 15 and will continue to be so until the eve of the new year. Variety shows will also be held in the new city hall to provide entertainment to night-goers.

MALAYAN BANK ACCREDITED BY THE PRA

Malayan Bank has recently been accredited by the Philippine Retirement Authority as one of the 15 banks authorized to receive deposits from Special Resident Retiree Visa holders and applicants. Shown, seated, from left, are Malayan Bank president George J. Martirez, PRA Chair PDGen Edgar B. Aglipay, Vice Chal of PRA board of trustees Gov. Armin Raquel-Santos. Shown standing, from left, are Malayan Bank AVP Anna N. Martirez, PRA Acting Board Secretary Jose Marie Capili, and PRA Deputy General Manager Col Fernando Z. Francisco.

Male prima ballerina in a tutu

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN PHILIPPINE ballet history, a male prima ballerina will take center stage in a holiday performance which will premiere in Camp John Hay, Baguio City at 6 p.m. of Dec 30.

Carlos Garcia, a Filipino ballet dancer who has been drawing raves in New York, Japan, Hong Kong and in several cities in Europe, will entertain Filipino ballet enthusiasts in a performance titled "An Evening of Minkus." It is his first grand appearance in his own country which is not used to having a male dancer do the prima ballerina role and wearing the female tutu at that.

Garcia was initially invited by the Philippine National Association of Ballet Dancers (PNAB) to teach international ballet skills and techniques to young aspiring Filipino ballet dancers.

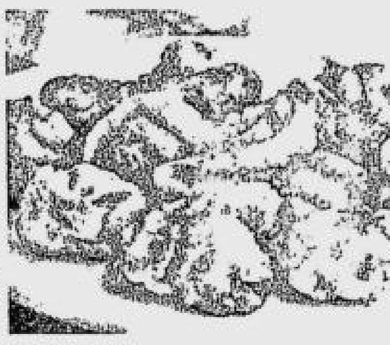
"I watched Carlos Garcia perform abroad and was very inspired with his performance. As my 16 year old daughter, Kelly is into ballet and trained in Paris, I asked him to coach her and he agreed. My friends also got their daughters under his tutelage and we are very happy because our daughters are taught international standards" said PNAB board member and spokesperson Jacqueline Go. She also explained that Garcia "expressed his desire to help ballet dancers who cannot afford the fees of an international coach and we discussed ways to raise funds. Hence, the idea of his performing here came up and even before we could get sponsors we have finalized the details of the performance."

Through Garcia, PNAB hopes to initially realize its goal of raising the standards of Philippine Ballet and providing a venue for better opportunities for potential ballet dancers.

Born in Quezon City, Carlos began his training at Chameleon Dance Theater. He continued his training on scholarship at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Carlos has many years of experience dancing as a male ballerina and has danced lead female roles that include Le Corsaire, Don Quixote, Paquita, Spring Waters and Odette in Swan Lake.

'Apat Na Sikat' from Dencio's

DENCIO'S HAS OBSERVED THAT A WIDE array of meal selections is enjoyed by those with discriminating and adventurous palates. Therefore once more, it introduces its guests to new meal offerings-this time, a choice of sizzling steak masterpieces guaranteed to whet anyone's appetite.



CHILI wings

Take a culinary journey with "Apat na Sikat", with steak in the spotlight. There's Tenderloin, a prime-cut beef tenderloin, incredibly juicy and full of flavor, served sizzling hot. Sizzling beef tips with a special gravy sauce are what you'll get if you order Tender Tips! Then there's the familiar T-Bone, a succulent cut of strip sirloin bone-in, served sizzling hot. Who can say no to Sizzling Litid-those beef tendons tenderized and sautéed in a special gravy sauce with celery, bell pepper and finger sili, served sizzling hot.

But these are not all. True to its flare for Filipino cuisine, Dencio's has, likewise, added more to its popular Pick-a-Pica menu.

Take your pick from Pinsec Fritos. These are fish flakes stuffed in molo wrapper deep-fried to a golden brown and served with a special pinsec sauce; or pick Chili Wings, deep-fried chicken wings cut into bite size pieces and coated with spicy sauce.

It's difficult to pick a favorite dish with so many delectable dishes to choose from so try all of Dencio's new offerings. This is the best way to experience food that is richly varied, flavorful, sumptuous, and at such reasonable prices!

Visit your nearest Dencio's branches in Scout Albano, Metrowalk, Rockwell, Eastwood, CCP Complex, Banawe, Greenhills, Capitol Hills, Camp John Hay, Jupiter, Las Pinas, SM Baguio, Paseo de Roxas, Brittany Bay, Robinsons Ermita, SM Megamall, Araneta Center, Paseo de Magallanes, Luisita Center, SM City Clark, Robinsons Starmills, Robinsons Dasmarinas and Subic.

GARDENIA GOES FRUITY AND NUTTY

Fruit-and-nut combinations are easy favorites. A lot of us may have experienced sumptuous sweet-sour taste of fruits and the crunchiness of nuts usually in chocolates, ice creams, cakes, and biscuits. How about fruit and nut combination in bread this time? From the Gardenia Amazing Loaf line comes an exquisite twist to one of the most fitting combinations of fruit and nuts-tasty bananas and chunky walnuts. The Gardenia Amazing Banana Walnut Loaf is bundled with delightful taste and health benefits. Certainly, you will be enticed to have a bite of Gardenia's Amazing Banana Walnut Loaf because of its real banana flavor and aroma. It is bursting with real banana bits that provide great fruity taste that could satisfy your craving for something sweet. Furthermore, every bite gives a crunchy feel because of its real walnut chunks. Gardenia continues to reinvent and produce various one-of-a-kind delights. The Amazing Banana Walnut Loaf is the latest of their unique, healthy, and lip-smacking great treats. Hurry and go loco with this limited offer premium loaf.

Gardenia
Banana Walnut

innove
ROBINSONS LAND

INNOVE PROVIDES CONNECTIVITY

Innove Communications Inc has been tapped by Robinsons Land Corp (RLC), one of the country's leading property developers, to provide connectivity services for its various office and commercial buildings. For its initial project with RLC, Innove has wired Robinsons Cybergate Centers 1 and 2 in Mandaluyong City, providing modern data services and ISDN PRI (Integrated Services Digital Network Primary Rate Interface). Sealing the partnership between the two companies are (from left) Globe SME group head Maridol D. Ylanan, Innove chief executive officer Gil B. Genio, RLC high-rise buildings division (RLC-HRBD) general manager Danilo E. Ignacio and RLC-HRBD AVP for business development Mybelle V. Gobio.

"WORLDWI TREN
S tin e"

INK SEMINAR HONOREE

ASA Color and Chemical Industries Inc, together with Siegwerk INK, recently sponsored a seminar at the Edsa Shangri-la Hotel wherein lectures about the latest in toluene-free and UV inks were presented to representatives from major converters/printers that serve the food industry as well as end-users like food manufacturers. During the event, a plaque of appreciation was given to Rumpai Sukhyanga, Alcan Packaging Strongpack of Thailand Advisor to the Regional President for Asia Pacific for being one of the speakers and gracing the event. Shown (from left) are ASA Color COO Gene F. Arbatin, Sukhyanga and Siegwerk INK head of flexible packaging Asia Pacific. Stefan Benito.

Delicious, inexpensive pasta discovery

IF YOU THOUGHT THAT ENJOYING LIP-smacking pasta means a trip to the ATM machine to visit those fancy Italian restaurants, well, think again.

Now, you don't have to wait for payday or a bonus to savor truly delicious pasta! Discover a delicious and inexpensive way to satisfy your pining for scrumptious pasta with the all new Greenwich Baked Macaroni Supreme!

Affordably priced at just P69 and P76 with regular drink, the Greenwich Baked Macaroni comes loaded with more premium ingredients that's guaranteed to have you wanting for more! For one thing, the Greenwich Baked Macaroni Supreme pleases your taste buds with more massive servings of the freshest, chunkiest, juiciest tomatoes, tender chicken, mouth-watering Italian sausage, scrumptious mushrooms and pepperoni, zesty parmesan and mozzarella cheese with crunchy cheese toppings. Now that's real value for money!

"We're extremely excited to offer the Greenwich Baked Macaroni Supreme to our growing number of consumers," says Cerma de Jesus, Greenwich product manager.

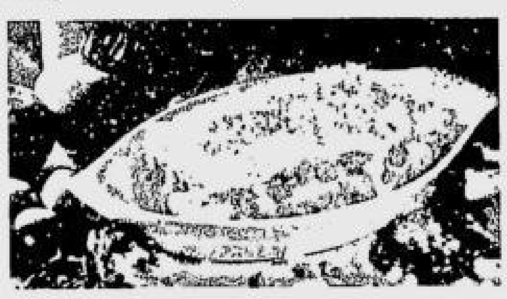
It's no wonder that Greenwich enjoys market leadership and is the country's number one pizza chain. Since Greenwich stores are tastefully designed to reflect a warm atmosphere, you'll immediately feel at ease to enjoy a truly unique dining experience.

"We always exert every effort in ensuring that our customers enjoy only the best products to make sure that they get their money's worth while enjoying a unique delightful dining experience at the same time. At Greenwich, we always give more to our customers like more great products to choose from that's why they keep coming back for more," adds de Jesus.

Now if you're a Metro Manila resident and you're busy at the office or just can't leave your house to visit the nearest Greenwich outlet, you can always have the Greenwich Baked Macaroni Supreme or other yummy Greenwich offerings delivered right at your doorstep!

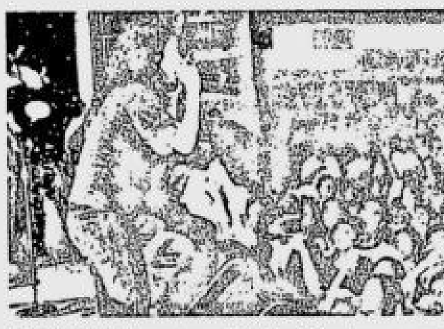
Just dial 819-4000 and Greenwich's "Siguradong On Time" delivery service will make sure that your orders are delivered fresh and on the dot.

For pasta that definitely gives you so much more in terms of taste and value, visit your nearest Greenwich outlet or dial 819-4000 and treat yourself to the temptingly delicious taste of the new Greenwich Baked Macaroni Supreme and be prepared for a delicious yet inexpensive discovery.



Bacolod bet is 'TeleTech Idol '06'

TELETECH RECENTLY HELD THE GRAND FInale of the "TeleTech Idol '06" during its mardi gras holiday party at the Marikina Sports Complex. The multi-awarded band Kamikazee, rocked the party with its high-energy performance. With full-throttle stage presence, Kamikazee rocked the 3,000-strong TeleTech audience and acknowledged the 2006 TeleTech Idol winner Jerome Kwan. For a global call center/BPO company that's been around in the Philippines since 2002, TeleTech has surely won its way to the hearts of its Filipino employees.



KAMIKAZEE lead vocalist Jay Contreras rocks the TeleTech holiday party at the Marikina Sports Park.

Maulik Parekh, TeleTech vice president and general manager for the Philippines, said, "We thought of organizing the 'TeleTech Idol' contest every year because we know Filipinos love music. We discovered that a lot of our employees sing very well also. I believe that through this yearly 'TeleTech Idol' competition, we have given our talented employees the chance to pursue a career and at the same time unleash their singing potential."

GM Maulik Parekh (2nd from left) with the 2006 TeleTech Idol champs (from left) Jerome Kwan, 2006 TeleTech Idol, Christine Idanan, 2nd runner up, and Ryan Sarmiento, 1st runner up.

Jerome "Rome" Kwan, a 21-year-old technical support associate from Bacolod City, bested six finalists representing the other TeleTech call centers in Novaliches, Quezon City; Cainta, Rizal; Dumaguete City; Lipa City; and Cebu City. Rome Kwan's pitch-perfect and soulful rendition of Josh Groban's "You Raised Me Up" won the judges' nod. This year's TeleTech Idol runners-up are Ryan Sarmiento from the Pasay City call center and Christine "Kaizie" Idanan from the Cainta call center.

Barely three months in the call center industry, Jerome Kwan is proving his worth and is aspiring to become a team leader by 2007. "While there are requirements on discipline and time management on the job, this doesn't mean that we don't enjoy our work. We do! The good thing about working for TeleTech is the company shows it cares for its employees," according to Rome.

In his year-end message to all TeleTech Philippines employees, Parekh announced that in 2006 TeleTech had promoted more than 700 employees and he expects many more to get promoted in 2007. "Career growth and opportunity is one of the biggest advantages of working in TeleTech. As our business grows, so shall our people." Parekh said.

To add more significance to the "TeleTech Idol" competition, tickets were sold that allowed the audience to vote for their favorite Idol. Funds raised from the ticket sales will go to the victims of the recent Typhoon Reming. Parekh added, "With all the blessings we are getting out of operating in this country, we feel that giving back to the less fortunate is the right thing to do. We sympathize with the typhoon victims and, thus, we decided to sell tickets for the Idol contest finals and then donate the funds we have raised."

TeleTech is the fastest growing BPO company in the country and it currently supports 10,000 employees in eight call centers all over the Philippines. TeleTech's headquarters are in Denver, Colorado but its global network extends across 80 customer management centers in North America, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Latin America.

TELETECH employees with Parekh

People, Events & Products

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aespinosa@inquirer.com.ph

Editor **Aries Espinosa**

Security Bank celebrates 55th anniversary in Cebu

SECURITY BANK CORP CAPS OFF its series of 55th anniversary events with another mega customer appreciation party at the Marriott Hotel in Cebu City, which turned out to be another resounding success. The grand celebration was a repeat of the concert party held in Manila last July as a way of thanking Security Bank's loyal clients for their continued patronage. The big turnout of their top clients is a clear manifestation the bank's level of relations with their key customers who are regarded as valued business partners.

Simultaneously, Security Bank formally opened a brand new business center at the Cebu Business Park at the heart of the city's commercial and financial district. It was an opportunity to reestablish its presence in the local banking scene as well as reiterate its commitment to continually provide customers with a unique, complete and rewarding banking experience that remains a compelling signature of the bank.

Shown is Security Bank president and CEO Alberto Villarosa (right) with the concert queen Pops Fernandez giving the thanksgiving toast to highlight the night's true stars-the customers.

TRAINING ON CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) medical consultant Dr. Lita Vizconde (2nd from right, partly hidden) joins a group of city and municipal health officers in screening a patient for cervical cancer during a GSK-sponsored visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA) training at the Dr. Jose Fabella Memorial Hospital in Manila. The training aimed to increase the participants' competencies in cervical cancer screening using 3% - 5% acetic acid.

NIPPON LIFE IN PERSONAL MOTIVATION WORKSHOP

Financial planners and managers of Nippon Life Insurance Company of the Philippines (NLP) recently attended a personal motivation program titled 'Developing a Culture of Personal Excellence' conducted by renowned inspirational speaker Francis Kong at the Mandarin Oriental Manila. Shown are (back row, 5th to 7th from left) NLP SVP for sales and marketing Shuji Omori, Francis Kong, president and CEO Yoshinobu Kimura, and (front row, 5th from left) FVP for special markets Josephine Lee with the qualifiers.

Festival Supermall gives merit to honest guards

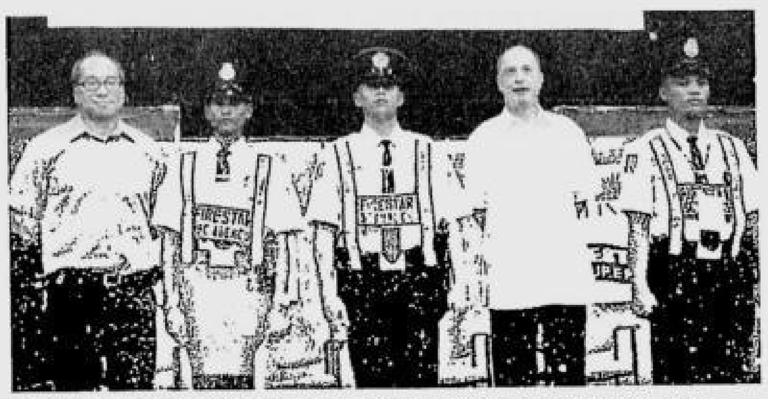
The management of Festival Supermall in Filinvest Corporate City, Alabang, Muntinlupa awarded certificates of merit to four uniformed men who remained righteous and went beyond their regular duties and responsibilities and performed various acts of honesty.

Security guard Louie Panaligan was on duty at the Bridgeway parking exit last April when he chanced upon a wallet owned by a certain Rod Frigas. The wallet contained P6,400 and $80 in cash, credit cards and the man's green card. Frigas was due to return to the United States the following day. Panaligan promptly brought the wallet to the security office.

Another security guard, Diogenes Bahian, recovered an expensive cellular phone in the same area. This he surrendered to his immediate supervisor and was claimed by the phone's owner, a certain Emmanuel Rubio.

Renante Satumbaga was on routine patrol at the Commerce Auto Drop when he found a shoulder bag that he immediately turned over to the security headquarters. The bag contained P1, 000 cash, cellular phone, credit cards, eyeglass, calculator and other valuable items.

Security guard Norberto Pareja made the latest recovery. He found a black clutch bag owned by a certain Dr. Antonio Catangui inside a supermarket pushcart at the Parkway parking area. The bag was said to have contained an undetermined amount of money and other valuables.



MICHAEL Gotianun, VP, Filinvest Land Inc, with Bahian, Panaligan, Urs Wuthrich, Palms Country Club GM, and Pareja.

'Philippine Legal Forms,' 'Family Lawyer' now on sale

TINA LITONJUA, SALES MANAGER OF Hyperlink Publishing, publisher of the first "Philippine Legal Forms and Your Family Lawyer" in CD format, enthusiastically endorses her products which are available in the shelves of all National Bookstore outlets here in Metro Manila and in the provinces. The enthusiastic response received by the publication copyrighted and released by lawyer Fernando B. Duque has encouraged the author to come up with another CD version which is meatier and substantive than earlier works. He is not yet disclosing the title pending copyright approval. Hyperlink also carries the e-library version of the "Philippine Supreme Court Decisions" from 1901 to Oct. 17, 2006 which, together with "Philippine Laws" (same period) is selling at P4,000 in a 3-pack promo sale.

However, the continuous patronage of "Philippine Legal Forms and Your Family Lawyer" is still vigorous and steadfast, reason why most outlets of National Bookstore are always out of stock of these editions. "Philippine Legal Forms" contains most commonly used document forms and pleadings, plus newly enacted laws like Anti-Violence Against Women, New Rules on Legal Separation and Annulment of Marriage, and jurisdiction of Philippine courts from the Supreme Court down to the Metropolitan Trial Courts.

"Your Family Lawyer", on the other hand, has its centerpiece The Family Code of the Philippines and such other laws useful to the family as Rent Control Law, Bouncing Checks Law, Senior Citizens Law, Barangay Law, the new legal fees in courts and in the Register of Deeds and the Clerical Error Law in Civil Registries.

These are also available at Central Lawbooks and Rex Bookstore outlets. "Philippine Legal Forms" is sold at P260 while the "Family Lawyer" is available at P300 only. Call 351-0491 or text 0917-5371937 or e-mail fbduque2004@yahoo.com for free delivery in Metro Manila.

ALQUIROS RECEIVES P1-M DEATH BENEFIT

Philippine AXA Life vice president George C. Mina handed the P1-million death benefit check to Allan Alquiros and his children. Allan's wife Cecilia died of breast cancer in August this year, and the P1-million check benefit is from her AXA group insurance policy. Alquiros' wife, Cecilia, was an employee of Pag-ibig Fund. Through the Home Development Mutual Fund-Employee Provident Fund (HDMF-EPP), Philippine AXA Life is able to grant beneficiaries of Pag-Ibig employees as much as P1 million in death benefits through its group life insurance program, which took effect in June 2006.

MICROSOFT PHILIPPINES EMPOWERS 'TECHNOPRENEURS'

Microsoft Philippines further reinforced its commitment to helping spur the growth of the local software economy by participating in the recently concluded 'TechnoNegosyo,' an event designed to encourage businessmen to explore the growing opportunities in technology entrepreneurship. TechnoNegosyo, the most recent endeavor of the Philippine Center for Entrepreneurship (PCE) and the biggest technology entrepreneurship expo in the country to date, brought together the leaders of the business and technology sectors. Among the participants were Microsoft Independent Software Vendors (ISVs) such as stag Philippines, Bizbox Inc, AccountMate, and NavSys. Under its Partner Program, Microsoft offers trainings and certifications to further develop the skills of its partners' workforces; access to vital information needed to plan and grow a business; resources that help partners position their businesses better and with greater credibility; and technical and online support for customer satisfaction. Technologies such as Microsoft Office and Microsoft Dynamics, which are meant to help small businesses, were showcased at the Microsoft booth. Shown is Microsoft Philippines' Ferdie Macatangay, product manager for Office (left), and Mae Rivera-Moreno, PR and community affairs manager (3rd from left), with Joey Concepcion, PCE founding trustee (2nd from left), and director Ramon Lopez, Presidential Consultant for Entrepreneurship and PCE executive (right).

Pinoy-made favorites at Christmas expo

Discover some of Pinoy-home made favorites like polvoron in almost a dozen flavors - butter and cheese, cashew, choco crisp, chocolate, peanut butter, classic style, cookies and cream, mocha, pinipig and rice crispies from Candilicious at the ongoing Christmas Gifts Expo 2006 at the Mega-Trade Halls 2 & 3, SM Megamall. Other old-time favorites like puto bumbong, suman, kasuy, pili nuts, pinangat, sisig and other delicacies from Quezon are also available together with a wide range of merchandise mix that come from practically all over the country. On display, too, aside from your favorite native delicacies are fashion accessories from Cebu and Zamboanga, home decors and wood chimes, paper products and handicrafts from Bicol, Pinatubo-ash frames, bamboo creations from Abra, and hardwood furniture from Cagayan Valley, Baguio, and Palawan. Christmas Gifts Expo will run until Dec 30 (except Dec 25) and is sponsored by HSBC, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Business World, and Chowking. For details, call LA Ducut and Co Inc at 873-8202, 634-7617, 0917-8973207, or e-mail info@christmasgiftsexpo.com.

Diabetics prone to heart disease

PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM DIABETES ARE also prone to develop heart disease. This is according to a research conducted by professor Paresh Dandona, the director of Diabetes-endocrinology Center of Buffalo, New York, and is one of the world's leading experts in the treatment of diabetes and vascular disease.

During his lecture in the 8th Ricardo Fernando Professorial Lecture held at Edsa Shangri-La Hotel, he reported that his team found a link between higher levels of C-reactive protein, a marker of inflammation in the blood of people with heart disease. The same inflammation marker has also been found to be high among people with diabetes. The presence of high levels of C-reactive protein is a predicted risk factor for cardiovascular events such as heart attack.

Their research also showed for the first time that circulating mononuclear cells -- the body's monocytes (the largest type of white blood cell) and lymphocytes -- exist in a pro-inflammatory state in obese persons known to be at increased risk of developing diabetes, heart disease or both. "These cells are creating a lot of nuisance in the obese," said Dandona. "They enter the artery and set up atherosclerosis. They activate fat cells to produce more pro-inflammatory factors. They interfere with insulin signaling, causing insulin resistance. They even enter the brain," he added.

The findings of this research provide new knowledge for physicians who are trying to find ways to better treat diabetes and its complications.

The 8th Ricardo Fernando Professorial Lecture is an annual event supported by UERMMMC-Institute for Studies on Diabetes Foundation Inc. and Philippine Society of Diabetologists in cooperation with the UE-ISDFI Alumni Association Inc. Present in the program were the ISDFI officers and committee, and other certified doctors and media guests.

New ofloxacin to boost treatment compliance

PASCUAL LABORATORIES RE cently launched its own brand of ofloxacin (Itex), a widely tested and clinically proven antibacterial agent. This brand is marketed at ten percent less than the originator brand in order to encourage treatment compliance among patients.

An enormous problem due to antibiotic-resistant has emerged over the years. This is mainly because of treatment non-compliance, a case where a patient does not complete the recommended course of antibiotic therapy.

This poses a problem because incomplete antibiotic therapy will cause some bacteria to survive in the body. The surviving bacteria will develop resistance to some form of antibiotics. When faced with this problem, the physician will have two choices-prescribed a higher dosage of the same antibiotic or switch to another antibiotic which has a broader spectrum and is more toxic. Either way, the patient is bound to spend more for his medicine.

There are a number of reasons that cause treatment non-compliance. Paramount among these reasons is the cost of the drug. Patients more often discontinue their medication because they cannot afford to sustain the treatment.

This economical pricing of the new ofloxacin will encourage full-dose compliance among patients, lessening the chances of antibiotic resistance and increasing the rate of successful therapeutic outcomes.

Ofloxacin is a prescription product. Patients are advised to seek a doctor's prescription before using the drug.

Ilusorio-Muñoz piano-violin duo enthralls Filipino audience

INTERNATIONAL FILIPINA CONCERT pianist Mariel Ilusorio and highly-acclaimed Chilean violinist-conductor Juan Luis-Muñoz enthralled the Filipino audience during their recent Philippine outreach concert tour held Dec. 2-16, in Bacolod, Cebu, Dumaguete, Davao, Cagayan de Oro, Bulacan and Baguio.

Ilusorio and Muñoz also conducted workshops and master classes for the pianists, violinists and music teachers in the provinces. The workshop and master class participants expressed their deep appreciation to both artists for taking time to share their musical wit and expertise.

"We rarely get a chance to meet world-class talents, much less to learn from two outstanding artists," one of the young local musicians in Cebu said. All the concerts were very well received. The husband and wife team has already received a number of invitations from various organizations and institutions for them to perform once again in the provinces.

The violin-piano duo partnership of Ilusorio and Muñoz was formed in 2005. Both Ilusorio and Muñoz have much experience performing in Europe, South America, and their present home, South Africa. The duo has performed in critically acclaimed concerts throughout South Africa. They also organized their own chamber music series at Rhodes University, titled Juan, Mariel, and Friends. Muñoz and Mariel teach and live in Grahamstown with their 10-month old daughter, Anita-Mariel.

Ilusorio began playing the piano at an early age in Manila and continued her musical studies in America through various scholarships, earning her Pre-College Diploma from The Juilliard School in New York and her Bachelor of Music Diploma from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio.

Mariel Ilusorio and Juan Luis-Muñoz

Ilusorio regularly returns to the Philippines to do outreach concert tours and master classes and work with fellow musicians from her country. She has also performed and given master classes in Indonesia. Mariel has recorded two CDs of solo piano music containing works by Scarlatti, Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Debussy, Buencamino and Santos. She has made South Africa her new home, where she continues her musical career as soloist, chamber musician, teacher, and accompanist.

Muñoz has made South Africa his home for the past 17 years, playing a very active and vital role in the country's musical life. Born in Santiago, he studied under Prof. Fernando Ansaldi and Prof.Sergio Prieto at the Catholic University of Santiago (Chile). There, he was concertmaster of the University of Santiago Symphony Orchestra and toured throughout Chile, Argentina and Peru as soloist and concertmaster of the MINEDUC Orchestra. He moved to South Africa as sub-principal violinist of the CAPAB Orchestra. He has since then performed numerous concerts as leader of the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Johannesburg Music Initiative, Free State Symphony Orchestra, the Eastern Cape Philharmonic Orchestra, and as conductor of the Cape Town Baroque Ensemble, which he founded.

Supported by the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Outreach and Exchange Program and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the 2006 outreach concert tour of Ilusorio and Muñoz was organized and presented by the Negros Cultural Foundation, Arts Council of Cebu Foundation Inc., Siliman University in Dumaguete City, Philippine Women's College in Davao City, Lourdes College in Cagayan de Oro City, Provincial Government of Bulacan and Pamanang Bulacan Foundation and the Baguio Country Club.

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MARIANO MARCOS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL & MEDICAL CENTER

Contract Reference Number
Name of the Contract
Location of the Contract

Standard Form Number: SF-INFR-05
Revised on: July 29, 2004

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The MARIANO MARCOS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL & MEDICAL CENTER, through its Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), invites contractors registered with and classified by the Philippine Contractors Accreditation Board (PCAB) to apply for eligibility and if found eligible, to bid for the hereunder contract:

Name of Contract	A. Construction of 25,000 Gallons, 17 meters tower elevated Water tank and deepwell drilling. B. Purchase of 2 units Submersible pump, 15 HP C. Purchase of 1 unit Asian Utility Vehicle
Location	MARIANO MARCOS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL & MEDICAL CENTER
Brief Description	A. Construction of the Elevated Water Tank would include General requirement, Which include Fabrication works, site works, civil works and equipment rental, Steel works, Concrete works & Form works. Plumbing Works, Deep well drilling would be 2 deep, well sites which include Site Works, deep well casing, pumps & appertenances. B. Delivery and installation of 2 units Submersible pump, Grungos, 15HP C. Any four-wheel vehicle locally manufactured chassis & body and an engine with Displacement not exceeding 1600 cc for gasoline and 7500 cc for diesel; Allowable options: AM/FM Stereo cassette player & car airconditioning
Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC) :	A. Php 3,356,294.42 - Water elevated tank, 25,000 gallons B. Php 560,000.00 - Submersible pump, 15HP C. Php 999,000.00 - Asian Utility Vehicle
Contract Duration :	90 days - Civil works
Contract Duration :	90 days - Goods

Prospective bidders should possess a valid PCAB License applicable to the contract, have completed a similar contract with a value of at least 50% of the of the ABC, and have key personnel and equipment (listed in the Eligibility Forms) available for the prosecution of the contract. The BAC will use non-discretionary pass/fail criteria in the Eligibility Check/Screening as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids. The BAC will conduct post-qualification of the lowest calculated bid.

All particulars relative to Eligibility Statement and Screening, Bid Security, Performance Security, Pre-Bidding Conference, Evaluation of Bids, Post-Qualification and Award of Contract shall be governed by the pertinent provisions of R.A. 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulation (IRR).

The schedule of BAC activities is as follows:

A. Civil Works

BAC Activities	Schedule
1. Receipt from prospective bidders of Letters of Intent (LOI) including Application for Eligibility	January 1-8, 2007
2. Issuance of Eligibility Forms	January 9-16, 2007
3. Receipt of Eligibility Requirements	January 17-23, 2007
4. Notice of Results of Eligibility Check	February 6, 2007
5. Issuance of Bid Documents	February 8 to March 23, 2007
6. Pre-bid Conference	March 15, 2007
7. Receipt and Opening of Bids	March 27, 2007

The BAC Secretariat shall prepare the draft IAEB for approval by the BAC at the pre-procurement conference.

B. Procurement of Goods

Activities	Schedule
1. Issuance of Bid Documents	January 1-26, 2007
2. Pre-bid Conference	January 10, 2007
3. Submission of Letters of Intent and Application for Eligibility *(If single-stage bidding is used, delete this activity)*	January 1-26, 2007
4. Opening of Bids	January 30, 2007
5. Bid Evaluation	February 1-15, 2007
6. Post-qualification	February 22, 2007
7. Notice of Award	March 2007

The BAC will issue to prospective bidders Eligibility Forms at Brgy. # 6 San Julian, Batac, Ilocos Norte, upon their submission of a LOI, and upon their payment of a non-refundable amount of Php 2,000.00 to the Mariano Marcos Memorial Hospital & Medical Center - Cashier. Prospective bidders shall submit the Eligibility Requirements to the BAC at the said address. They may also obtain the results of the Eligibility Check by the BAC at the same address.

The BAC will issue Bidding Documents only to bidders declared by the BAC to be eligible for the bidding upon payment of a non-refundable amount of Php 5,000.00 - Civil Works; Php 3,000.00 - Goods to the Mariano Marcos Memorial Hospital & Medical Center Cashier.

The Mariano Marcos Memorial Hospital & Medical Center assumes no responsibility whatsoever to compensate or indemnify bidders for any expenses incurred in the preparation of their bids.

Approved by:
(Sgd.) MONA LIZA B. PASTRANA, M.D., FPOGS
BAC Chairman

(PDI--Dec 19 & 26, 2006)

OBITUARIES

> **"Eternal life will swallow up that which can die. God made us for this very reason and He has given us the Spirit as a guarantee that we will live again."**
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:4-5

GLEN ELMER L. ALVARADO, M.D.

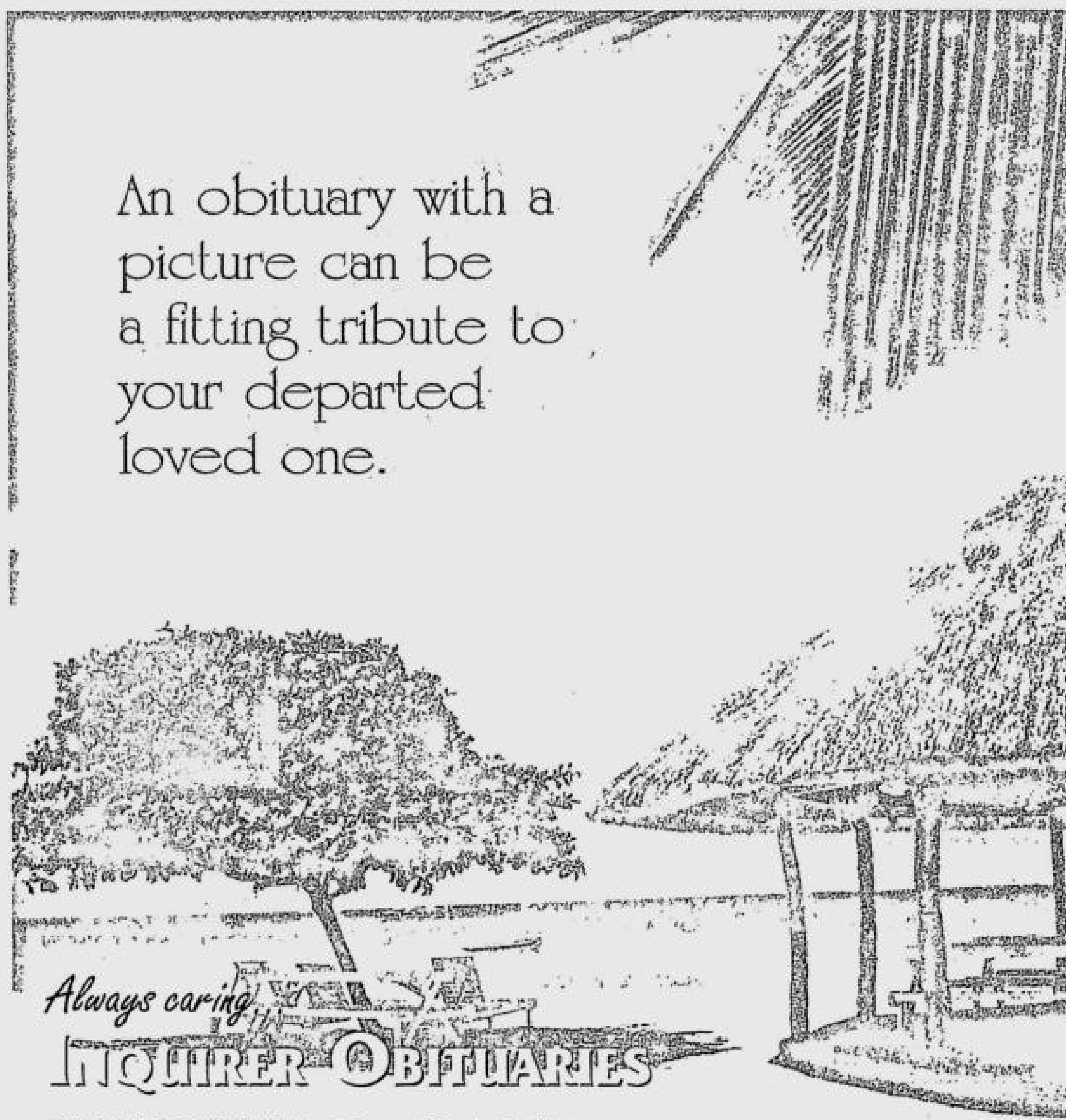
February 18, 1961 – December 23, 2006

His bereaved wife **MALU**; sons **ARVIN** & **JUSTIN**; mother **LILIA**; siblings; **BABY** & **OYING**; mother and father-in-law, brothers and sisters in-law and all relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for his soul.

His remains lie in state at Arlington Memorial Chapels, Inc. at Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

An 11:00 AM Necrological services will be held today, December 26, 2006, and a Requiem Mass will be celebrated tomorrow, December 27, 2006 at 9:00 AM at Arlington, before the 1:00 PM cremation at Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina Crematorium.

Interment of his ashes shall follow thereafter.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>
> **John 11:25-26**

Mercedes Cubacub Canlas

of Lubao, Pampanga and Quezon City

Peacefully joined our Lord
on December 24, 2006 at the age of 81.

Her loving husband **Anatolio**; children **Ditas**, **Loy** & **Joey**, **Susan** & **Dante**, **Bong** & **Chaela**; grandchildren **Ryan**, **Anna**, **Trisha**, **Bianca**, **Ayo**, **Ino** and **Iyo**; brother **Andres** and sister-in-law **Mila**, relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie in state at La Funeraria Paz, Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

Interment will be on Thursday, December 28, 2006 at Himlayang Pilipino, Tandang Sora, Quezon City right after the 9:00 a.m. Mass at La Funeraria Paz.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Inquirer Classifieds SM Megamall Branch is open today, December 26, 2006 from 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.

BUSINESS

Tougher antiprofiteering rules issued

11-month net foreign buying up

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

NET FOREIGN BUYING IN THE stock market from January to November this year reached P53.46 billion, or 127.6 percent higher than the P23.49 billion recorded in the same period last year.

Francis Lim, president and chief executive officer of the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE), said this was one of the reasons for the continued surge in stock prices and the continued strengthening of the peso.

During the first 11 months of the year, the PSEi closed at 2,788.46 points or 33.03 percent higher than its 2,096.04 level at the end of 2005. The 11-month gain of the PSEi comes on top of the annual 15-percent growth in 2005 and the 26.4 percent advance in 2004.

"The figures could only mean that the surge in stock prices is accelerating, and that speaks a lot about investors' confidence on the country's economic prospects," Lim said.

By Ronnel W. Domingo

MALACAÑANG HAS ISSUED AN administrative order providing for a stricter rule against unscrupulous traders who jack up prices of basic commodities even as the Department of Trade and Industry assured the public that there was no cause for prices to go up during the holiday season.

Trade Secretary Peter B. Favila said Joint Administrative Order No. 3 defined profiteering as the "sale or offering for sale of any basic necessity or prime commodity in excess of its true worth."

DTI finds no cause for prices to go up

The JAO covers the departments of trade, agriculture, health and environment.

While JAO No. 3 was signed on Sept. 30, it still needs to be published in at least two newspapers of general circulation before it could take effect.

Favila said the order amended the implementing rules of Republic Act No. 7851 or the Price Act of 1993.

The law was passed to ensure the availability of basic products at reasonable prices, especially during times of natural disasters and calamities, but "without denying legitimate business a fair return on investment.

Section 3, Rule 10 of the law's implementing rules defined "grossly in excess of its true worth" as a level that was more than 10 percent of a price observed in the immediately preceding month.

The 10-percent rule establishes a prima facie evidence which, by itself, is sufficient to pursue a case against profiteering.

But JAO No. 3 said such definition was erroneous and has no legal basis, and that it would serve to circumvent the prohibitions of the Price Act.

"Profiteering may be committed in circumstances where there are no price increases yet evidence may be proven that a commodity price is "grossly in excess of its true worth,"' the order stated.

In a briefing, Trade Undersecretary Zenaida Maglaya said DTI monitoring showed there was no reason for prices of prime commodities to go up in during the holidays.

"This is what we found with meat, poultry and even vegetables although prices of round fruits may go up in the days leading to New Year due to the tradition of having these for good luck," Maglaya said.

Gov't prepares measures to create more jobs

By Michelle V. Remo

THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND Development Authority has vowed to push for measures that will help generate over 1 million jobs yearly starting next year.

"I have to admit we (government) have not been successful in attaining our (job creation) targets. We will work on surpassing our targets this time," Neda Director General Romulo Neri said at the sidelines of the agency's yearend press briefing last week.

The Arroyo administration had set a target of creating 1.4 million to 1.6 million jobs a year starting 2003. Neri admitted, however, that the actual number of jobs created hit only 574,000 in 2003, 977,000 in 2004, and 700,000 last year. He said this year's number was also expected to fall below 1 million.

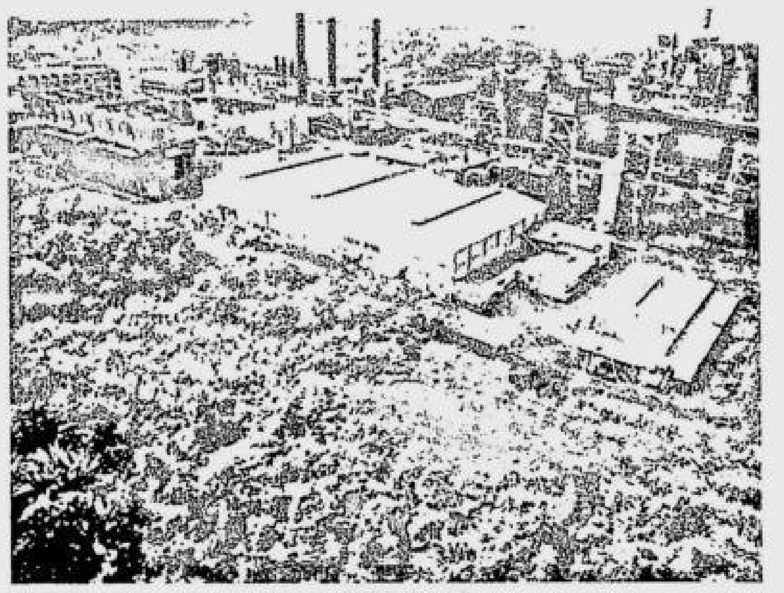
In his presentation during the briefing, Neri said the government's priority programs for job generation included the development of more land for agribusiness, increase in infrastructure spending, reducing red tape, the operation of the Ninoy Aquino Internation Airport Terminal 3, and the modernization of the shipping industry.

Neri said the state had some 2 million hectares of land that remained untapped and these could be transformed into agribusiness farms for the benefit of landless farmers.

He said the government would start developing these pieces of land in 2007 to create 2 million additional jobs.

Another 1.7 million jobs could also be created if the government would realize its goal of spending P1.7 trillion for infrastructure development over the medium term (based on the assumption that one job is created for every P1 million spent for infrastructure).

The development of infrastructure facilities will also help attract more investments which, in turn, would create more jobs, he said.



AERIAL view of the mothballed Philnico plant

Nonoc's hopes dim as $1-B deal totters

By Daxim L. Lucas

(First of two parts)

SPECIAL REPORT

FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS now, the people of Nonoc Island have waited for the revival of the one industry that would allow them to do what they claim is the only job they're good at, and the only job they love.

Since 1986, inhabitants of this mineral-rich island off the coast of Surigao City have been looking forward to the return of nickel mining.

This anticipation has grown to an almost fever-pitch excitement in recent years as the noise about the revival and rehabilitation of Philippine Nickel Corp. grew louder.

Talks with investors

Indeed, Chinese investors led by Jinchuan Nonferrous Metals Corp., Baosteel Group and China Development Bank have been talking with the government and Philnico for the right to revive the operations since 2002.

At stake is about $1 billion in fresh capital that the Chinese had pledged to invest in the company to restart its nickel and cobalt mining and refining operations. The plant was the country's biggest until it closed in 1986.

Hopes ran high that a definitive trilateral deal would be sealed between Jinchuan, Philnico and the Philippine government by this month.

Disagreements

Last week, however, the prospects of reviving what is one of Asia's largest nickel mining venture went from rosy to dim almost overnight.

Disagreements over how much each party will get from the rehabilitated firm have put the deal on hold, with the Chinese investors seeking more time, ostensibly to further study the mine's prospects.

Even on the lowest levels, the stakes are high for the inhabitants of the island who have known few other trades.

"In case our mining operation will be [revived], we will operate this plant, and it will be a big contribution to the business sector, and to our fellow Surigaonons who can work here," said 54-year-old Pio Ibarra, a former employee of the mine and now a *barangay* captain on the island.

"Philinico will be a big improvement [to] Surigao, to our national government if this mine will [reactivated]," he said.

This fact is not lost on the national government.

President Macapagal-Arroyo had pushed for the deal with her Chinese counterpart, which will become the single biggest Chinese investment in the country if it pushed through.

Despite the government's backing, the people of Surigao are worried about the growing opposition to mining at the national level, especially in Manila where many of the policies are formulated. For the people of Nonoc, many opponents of the mining industry don't see the real picture from where they stand.

People getting worried

"Our critics don't know what they're taking about," said Vic Nuñez, who supervises Philnico's skeletal operations team on the island. "We need help to make them see that not all mining is evil."

Backers of the mining industry have their work cut out for them, given that even the influential Catholic Church is wary of allowing foreign firms in to exploit the country's natural resources.

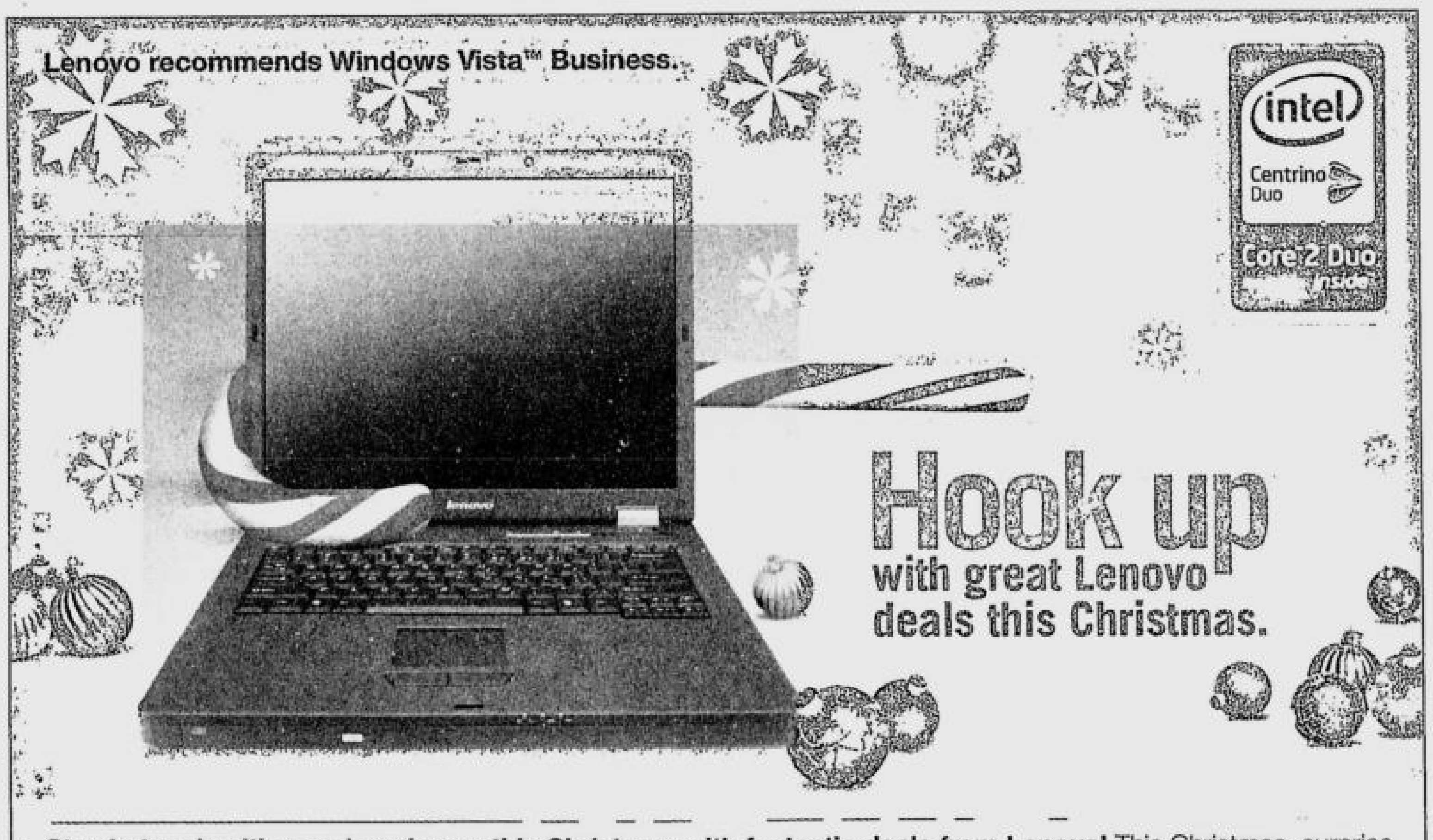
Surigao-based Church leaders, however, hold a more flexible view on mining, perhaps because the situation on the ground is much clearer to them than to those at the national level.

"We are antimining with the way it is being done now, because we are looking for responsible mining operations, especially where we are and where people are affected," said Bishop Antonieto D. Cabajog. "But if the mining practice is not only legal but takes into consideration the ecology, the people, the safety, we have no objections to that."

He pointed out that the inhabitants of Nonoc Island as well as the other mining sites in the province have been very active in protecting their environment, to the extent of protesting against mining firms that violate environmental rules.

As it turned out, it was not concerns over the environment that would derail the deal but concerns of a monetary kind, as all three parties involved jockey for a bigger slice of the nickel mining pie.

(To be continued)



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WELL AND GOOD

Tina Juan

Close gym encounters

Part Two

I HAVE MET ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE IN THE gym. Most of them were average fitness Joe and Joanne but some were unusual characters I would never forget.

Fashion

Long before Lindsay Lohan and Britney Spears started the "fad," we had a client who liked to exercise without underwear. Gym instructors quickly discovered her exhibitionist tendencies because she favored wearing tennis skirts!

She not only scandalized members but also caused a hygiene problem. Imagine the amount of antibacterial spray we had to use after she worked out on the stationary bike. After the staff confronted her, she left in a huff, I assume to shock another gym. So be warned, somewhere out there roams a pantyless exerciser.

There was a time when lacy workout wear was popular. One client took the trend a little too far by wearing her actual lingerie. It was a little disconcerting to see underwear worn as outerwear. Did she know it was a little strange? It's hard to tell. She behaved as if it was perfectly normal to exercise in front of strangers in a Josie Natori.

Then we had a client the staff nicknamed "spaceman." He exercised covered from neck to ankles in a silver "sauna" suit. He claimed to have been a college boxer in the 1950s and insisted this was how he got fit.

Our explanations of overheating and possible electrolyte loss fell on deaf ears. At least we got him to agree to drink a sports drink.

We also had a *balikbayan* client who liked to come in covered from head to foot in tight, loud-colored spandex. He looked like an Olympic speed skater from the '80s.

I can just imagine the stares he must have gotten as he walked from the parking lot to our front door. He might have been painful to look at but he wasn't hurting anyone. In fact, he was a very nice guy who was extremely polite to everybody. He just got his kicks from dressing that way.

Characters

One guy was always looking for unconventional ways to use the strength machines. He would sit on the lever arm of the multi-hip machine and use it like a swing. He would lie on his back on the seat of the lat-pull down machine and hook his legs over the bar to pull it toward his chest. Go figure.

We had an asthmatic client who liked to lift very heavy weights. So heavy she would turn blue and her knees would buckle. No amount

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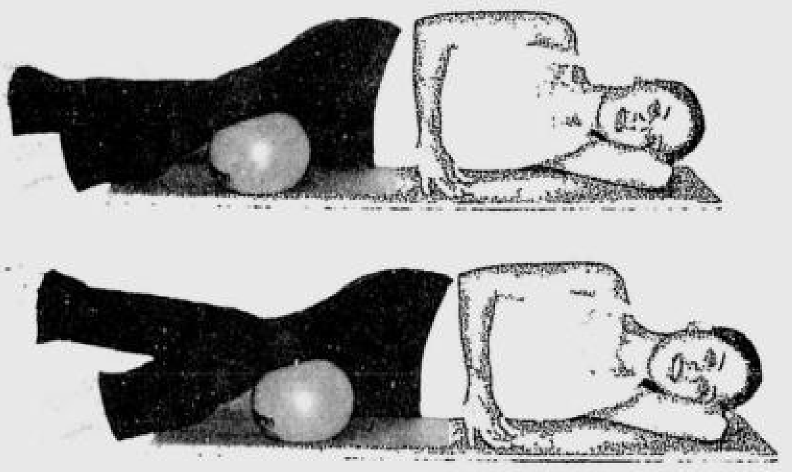
CLIP & SAVE

EXERCISE OF THE WEEK

Side-lying inner thigh lift



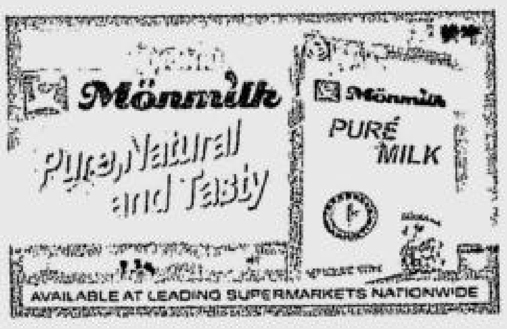
THIS CLASSIC EXERCISE STRENGTHENS and tightens the hard-to-reach inner thigh muscles.

Equipment:
Exercise mat, rubber ball (or cushion), and ankle weights (optional)

Exercise technique:
1. Lie sideways with your bottom arm bent underneath your head. Your top arm is in front for balance.
2. Your bottom leg is straight. Your top leg is bent with your knee supported by a ball.
3. Lift the bottom leg a few inches off the mat and hold. This is your starting and ending position.
4. Lift your leg for the desired number of repetitions. Switch sides.

Performance tips:
1. Make sure to lift the leg by contracting the inner thigh muscles and not just by lifting the ankle.
2. When lowering the leg, return to the starting position of a few inches from the floor.
3. When your muscles get stronger, use ankle weights.
4. Lift the leg with precision and control. Avoid jerking or lifting too fast.

Repetitions:
Do 10-15 repetitions.



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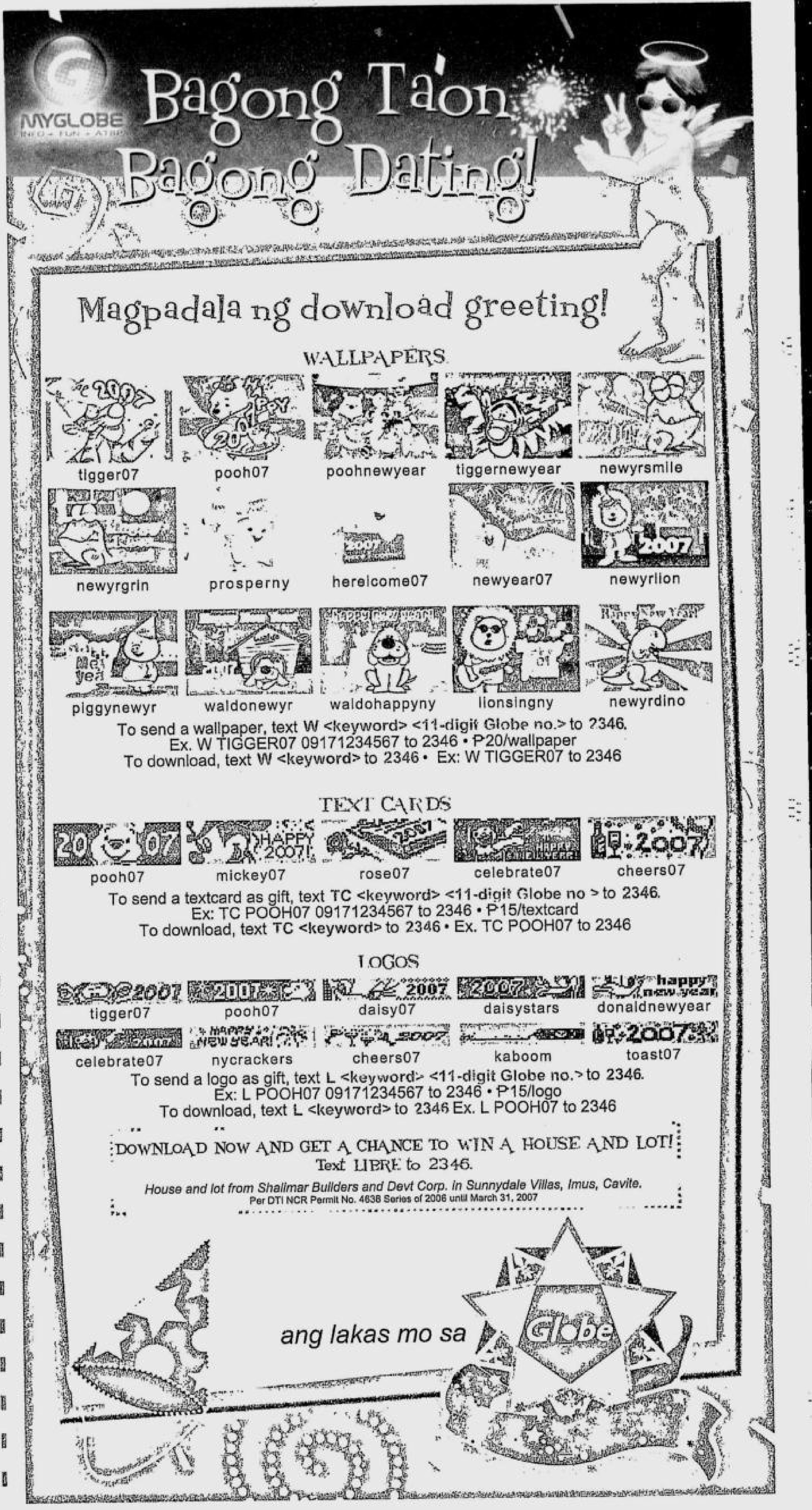

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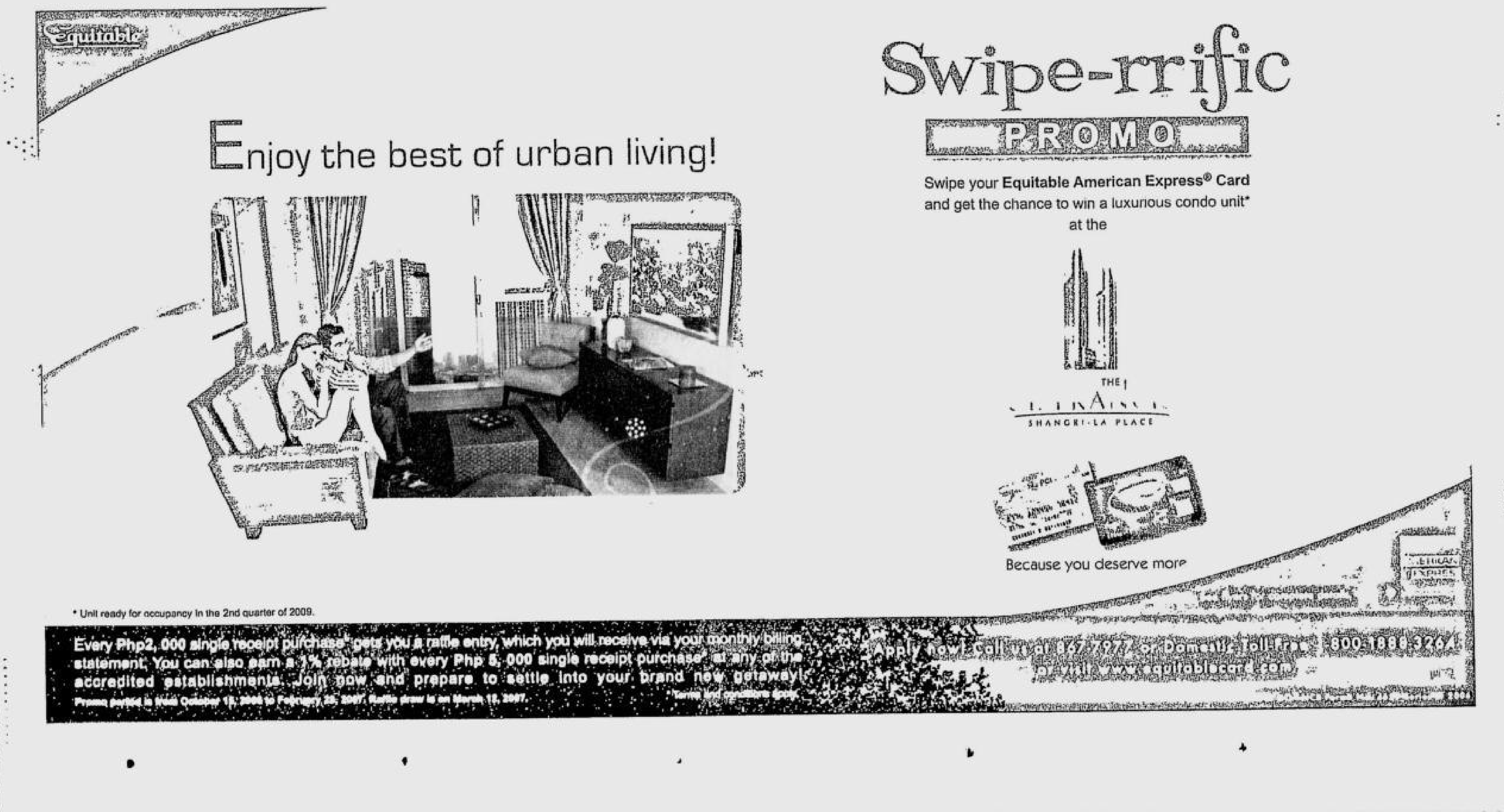

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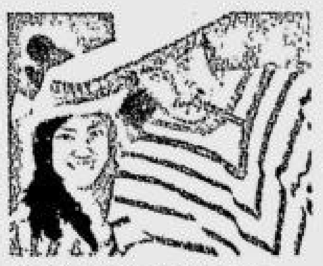
HERDING 'EM IN. Chikka business development director for the Americas Gio Bacareza; handsome Chikka CEO Dennis Mendiola; Junie Fajardo (center, standing); Chito Bustamante; and the gorgeous Chikka Cowgirls

QUALITY assurance manager Jahred Salazar with Chikka cowgal Love

COWBOYS' delight. Eizza Lim and Leigh Perez.

CHIKKA pioneers. Mikey Garrovillo and Tisha Silang

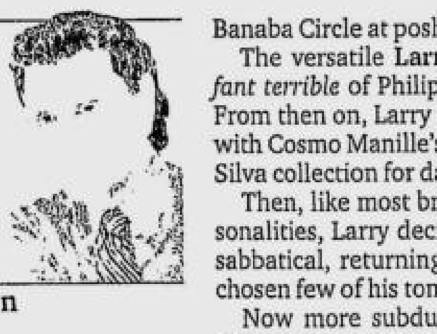
COWBOY Vince Perez, Chikka chair


CHIKKA programmers Hershey Moneda and John Jalandoni

CHIKKA Christmas party hosts Bianca Valerio and JM Rodriguez

BIDSHOT team Patrick Garcia, Tommy Villanueva and Neil Bernando

A Wild West celebration



WITHOUT BATTING AN EYELASH

Maurice Arcache

Photos by Alex Van Hagen using **Kodak** EasyShare system

THE EVENT AT EMBASSY'S CHIC cuisine and Dance Club had tons and tons of text people arriving in full "Chikka" force, *palanggas*.

The posh nightspot had the old Western frontier motif, with invitees in Wild West outfits. A huge sign, "Welcome to Chikka Country," greeted.

A mix of Chikka rah! rah! employees, business partners, hotshot namedroppables and celebrities were there to celebrate the holiday season to pay tribute to probably the most successful Philippine-based "dotcom and mobile technology enabler," *palanggas*.

Before the swinging bands, DJs and gorgeous models got the party rolling, Chikka hot CEO **Dennis Mendiola** said a few words: "We credit the success of Chikka to our employees... And for the full support of partners, Globe Telecom, Smart Communications and Sun Cellular."

A truly fab event celebrating the courage of the founders of Chikka in breaking new technological ground, establishing vibrant communities, and venturing into "the Wild West" where only the best and the toughest survive, dahlings.

We ain't the undisputed Text Capital of the world for nothing, *n'est-ce pas* (as in, *di bala*)?

Black party

The Fort Strip is fast becoming like a small Las Vegas, *palanggas*, with bars and restaurants and dance clubs mushrooming up faster than you can bat an eyelash.

The latest is as cool as its name, the Mint Bar. It threw a fabulous Black Party sponsored by Chivas Regal, Kahlua, Cruise Ice Pale Pilsen.

The invitation read: "Come as you please and be as creative as possible for as long as you are in black." Needless to say, party people arrived like dark clouds of a thunderstorm, all in black, natch!

Once the booze flowed the spirits flew high, *palanggas*. The place rocked till way-way past Cinderella's bedtime. After all, Mint Bar caters to all ages, and anything goes, dahlings.

Check out these days: Thursday nights, "Retro music," with premier DJ **Jon Tupaz**; Friday nights, "RnB Music"; and Saturday nights, hot dance-till-you-drop "House Music."

Larry's 60th

He was once the youngest, most talented ready-to-wear designer of Rustan's and was the favorite protégé of Rustan's grand matriarch, the late **Glecy Tantoco**, dahlings.

He was also the first off-the-rack designer to hold a gala show, private-salon style, at the sprawling residence of the Tantoco *famille* on Banaba Circle at posh Forbes Park.

The versatile **Larry Silva** became the *enfant terrible* of Philippine fashion, *palanggas*. From then on, Larry was on an awesome roll, with Cosmo Manille's younger pack wearing a Silva collection for day or evening events.

Then, like most brilliant and eccentric personalities, Larry decided to take a long, long sabbatical, returning to the scene for only a chosen few of his tons of clients.

Now more subdued but as witty as ever, Larry S. threw a fab 60th birthday bash inviting 200 of present and past close pals to his huge condo in Greenhills, *palanggas*.

The guest list was a casting coup, dahlings, with pals from the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s, 2000, to the present all accounted for.

After an excellently prepared dinner, loads of chit-chat and tons of catching up, invitees were one in saying it was a powerful testimony to how much Larry's pals love him. Faster than you could bat an eyelash, the celebrator quickly answered: "Now I know it is not about counting the years, but counting your blessing. I am so blessed by your presence."

I say we, too, are so blessed to have you as a friend.

New showroom

Got this invite to a *tres* interesting launch. Since the place was a skip and a hop from my place, without batting an eyelash, *palanggas*, *moi* dashed over to the new showroom of Galleria BTicino, which is definitely a place to see—a showcase of "art and technology in electrical industry."

Moi did not feel lost at all in the company of interesting invitees from the construction and electrical industry, architects, engineers, developers and electrical distributors.

"BTicino is the world's specialist in products and systems for electrical installations and information networks. With a number of plants and production facilities in Italy and abroad, as well as a successful, well-known brand name in more than 60 countries around the world, BTicino has been part of the Legrand Group since 1989," explained tall, good-looking Italian **Dario Tunesi**, managing director of BTicino Phils.

We were all shown the light series for a more sober and minimalist lifestyle.

Apparently in the Philippines, "Living, Light and Light Tech" is popular for its functional and decorative elements, providing multiple functions and maximum protection to users at *tres* reasonable prices.

And one thing for sure, all BTicino products are user-friendly, easy to install and use. Most importantly, they give users maximum protection.

Visit Galleria BTicino at 2280 Don Chino Roces Extension (formerly Pasong Tamo Extension), Makati, or call 8928972.

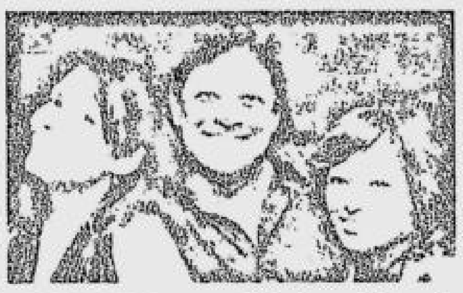
TURNING BACK THE YEARS: The celebrator with Margie Floirendo, Rustan's Criselda Lontok and Nena Romualdez. Standing: Citoy Lopez, Eva Abesamis, Henry Zabarte, Toni Rose Gayda and Cory Quirino

GINA Rodriguez, Maryann Ojeda and Lally Medalla

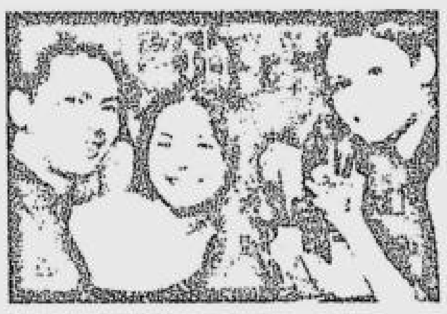
HAIL! HAIL! The gang's all here. Seated: Peching Gomez, celebrator Larry Silva, Nini Licaros, Brenda Hefron, Belen Bulchanel and Roi Philips. Standing: Julie Yap Daza, Robert Castañeda and Gigi Reyes

OSCAR Medalla and Toti Hechanova

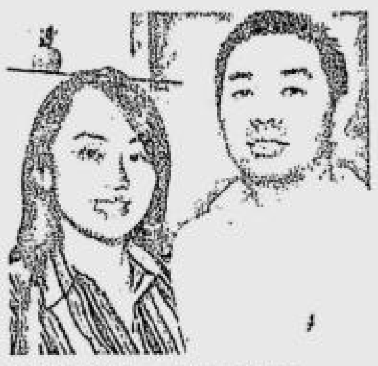
MINT BAR'S hotshots. Raymund Puyat, Larry B. Ramos, Greg Trinidad and Manni Alcid


OJIE Reloj, Roxanne Silverio and PR gal Rina Reyes

PHILIP Gabriel with Lea Pascua and Cap Pangalangan


VJ JAYME, Ailia Robes and gorgeous Anna Escalone

MICHELLE Cacdac, Ceara Cecilio and Migs Gianan


EMERSON and Anne Chua, BTicino distributor

SHERYL Uy explains Axolute, the latest BTicino technology

DARIO Tunesi, BTicino Phils. managing director, and renowned artist Ramon Diaz of Galleria Duemila

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Put yourself at the top of your gift list

INSIDE OUT

Cory Quirino

WHEN YOU GIVE TO OTHERS, remember to give to yourself, too.

For every occasion that calls for gift-giving, you should put your own name at the top of the list. Be your own best Santa.

Even if you have someone in your life, remember that the first person you should love is you. Look at yourself in the mirror and say: "Hon, you are loved."

And what are the best gifts to yourself?

With the avalanche of information, discoveries and rediscoveries in health and medicine, it is no wonder that the general public is confused.

What to do and where to begin? Obviously, people do not have the time to swallow 20 supplements, drink more than one or two kinds of fortified juices or sip cups of herbal tea.

So, how does one begin?

These tips are old but timeless, though given some innovative adjustments:

Balance

Moderation. Anything in excess is not good. Whether it's work or play, feasting or fasting, going to the extreme will not help you in any way. If it's a diet you have just adopted, take a long hard look at it and see if any food nutrient that your body needs has been omitted.

Usually, the best diet of all is to cut back on calories and quantities. Thus, the operative word is balance—knowing that what you are doing for yourself is just right.

This applies to workaholics (and would-be alcoholics), too. Listen to the inner voice whispering: "Enough is enough." However, if you are doing too little, the voice will say "not enough."

Calmness. Combating illness or a health challenge also requires that you remain calm. A state of mind that allows peace to prevail will allow for better and faster healing.

Moreover, emotional stability is so closely connected to one's physical well-being that the state of one's heart normally affects one's state of health.

Your mind, which is a thought factory, never ceases its operations. Thus, it can be overtaxed to its limits. When it does get overworked due to stress, lack of sleep or absence of nutritional support, it may lead to conditions like migraine, hypertension, stroke, mental fatigue, etc.

Adopt a regular regimen for calmness like relaxation/pampering treatments (massage, reflexology, foot spa), giving yourself a break from time to time. Mind-body exercises such as yoga will be helpful.

Meditation. Make time to shut off your mind from the noise and distraction of the world. Never underestimate the healing benefits of closing your eyes and your mind even if—only for 10 minutes twice a day—upon waking up and before bedtime.

Listening to soft music will soothe your senses, ease frayed nerves, steady a restless heart.

Exercise. A moderate regimen ought to give your hormones a boost, strengthen your bones, tone your muscles and raise your energy levels. You cannot go wrong with exercise. It is a youth-booster.

Nutritional support. An adequate vitamin/mineral supplementation is a must for general good health. One cannot rely on the daily food intake to cover the body's nutritional needs.

Love

There isn't any force more powerful on earth than love. The best gift of all is that borne out of your own heart. The same gift that must be given away if it is to work its magic. So, start with yourself.

You can feel the goodness of love only when:

- You allow yourself to give it and receive it. Some feel guilty or unworthy to have this precious gift perhaps due to religious/societal pressure or self-denial. Whatever your self-imposed constraints may be, just remember you only get what you deserve through your own expectations.
- Share your love by going beyond the borders of the self via community/civic work.

Love yourself holiday treat:

- Instead of writing to Santa, write to yourself. List down all the good things you want/desire/long for.
- Light a votive candle. And repeat a prayer over and over again each day: "The gift of love is mine today and always."
- Bathe in a tub of warm water. Make a holiday brew of fresh orange and apple juice with a dash of cinnamon and honey. Sip it warm while soaking in your tub.

You deserve the best because you are the very best.

Love and light!

INNER AWARENESS
Jaime T. Licauco

Jesus from a different perspective

> Logic, facts and evidence must prevail if we are sincerely interested in discovering the truth

IN THIS PREDOMINANTLY CHRISTIAN country, the story of Jesus, his birth and death, his family background, his teachings and miracles are taken as facts, not subject to question or debate.

Anyone who disagrees with the story or even simply doubts its authenticity or reality is denounced as a heretic, if not a lunatic.

Perhaps we cannot really find a definitive or universally acceptable answer to the many questions about Jesus, The Christ. But logic, objective facts and evidence, not religious dogmatism, blind faith or emotional outbursts, must prevail if we are sincerely interested in discovering the truth.

Take the following incident that happened about a year ago. I was a guest speaker in a meeting of a society of insurance companies. Over lunch, somebody asked me, "Jimmy, have you seen the movie 'The Passion of Christ' by Mel Gibson?"

I replied, "No, I would rather see Jesus making love to Mary Magdalene than see him being tortured to death."

Upon hearing my reply, the man seated to my right blurted out angrily, "That's blasphemy!" The angry man turned out to be a high-ranking member of the militant and wealthy Catholic sect Opus Dei, which Dan Brown portrayed in "The Da Vinci Code" as "a murderous, fanatical and sinister Catholic cult."

Of course, the book is fiction, as Dan Brown says.

Anyway, knee-jerk reactions like that of the Opus Dei member are what make objective discussions about Jesus and his life so difficult in this country. Before one can present his arguments or evidence, he is at once rebuked or silenced.

Unafraid to ask

Fortunately, there are brave souls like Dr. Elaine Pagels and researchers Tim Freke and Peter Gandy who are not afraid to report what they have found, even though they might go against commonly held religious beliefs and dogmas.

Pagels, who has a Ph.D in Theology from Harvard, wrote the best-selling book "The Gnostic Gospels" based on the sensational discoveries of lost or hidden Christian gospels in Nag Hammadi, Upper Egypt, in 1945. They were written on Egyptian papyrus material in the Coptic language.

The gospels were considered heretical or inauthentic by the emerging Catholic Church. In several councils, beginning with the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, the church officially adopted only four of the many existing gospels of Christ at the time. They approved only the gospels of Mark, Luke, Matthew and John.

Fortunately, the followers of the gnostic point of view hid their gospels very well.

What emerged from these different gospels (which have come to be known collectively as Gnostic Gospels) is a picture of Jesus Christ quite different from that handed down to us by the accepted gospel writers.

Instead of an authoritarian dispenser of truth and a savior, he appears more like a sympathetic and wise teacher liberating man from his ignorance of spiritual truths, one who listens and answers questions of his disciples with patience.

Same source

In the Nag Hammadi text, "Gospel of Thomas," for example, Jesus told Thomas, after the latter recognized him, that they both had received their being from the same source: "I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become drunk from the bubbling stream which I have measured out. He who will drink from my mouth will become as I am; I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him."

As one author pointed out, whereas the approved gospels "emphasized the eschatological expectation of the future coming of the Kingdom of God, the Gospel of Thomas in its oldest form stressed the finding of wisdom, or of the 'Kingdom of the Father' in the knowledge of oneself guided by the sayings of Jesus."

Freke and Gandy, on the other hand, found evidence that the early Christian concepts really came from paganism, and early Christians merely adopted the pagan teachings as their own.

Here are some of their shocking discoveries, as mentioned in their book "The Jesus Mysteries."

"Whereas today the gathered faithful revere their Lord Jesus Christ, the ancients worshipped another god-man who, like Jesus, had been miraculously born on 25 December before three shepherds. In this ancient sanctuary, Pagan congregations once glorified a Pagan redeemer who, like Jesus, was said to have ascended to heaven and to have promised to come again at the end of time to judge the quick and the dead."

Their conclusion? "We have become convinced that the story of Jesus is not the biography of a historical Messiah, but a myth based on perennial Pagan stories. Christianity was not a new and unique revelation, but actually a Jewish adaptation of the ancient Pagan Mystery religion. This is what we have called 'The Jesus Mysteries Thesis.'"

For most Filipino Christians who have long accepted without question the teachings of the Church, this is indeed a hard pill to swallow. But they can always verify whether there is a shred of truth to the findings of these researchers before rejecting them.

MEDICard The Healthcare I Deserve!

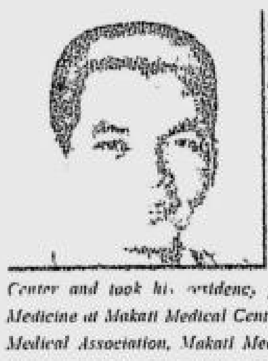
Take Charge Doc!

What are the emergency measures to treat Acute Firecracker injury?

For 1st degree burn, where the patient has redness due to heat from blast injury; the best thing to do is to wash the area and apply moisturizing oitments. Raising the hand will also help relieve the pain. Although 1st degree burn is not serious, blast injury may also cause fractures, hence it is still wise to seek the doctors advice. If there is a laceration, just do pressure dressing and bring the patient to the nearest hospital for evaluation, repair of wound, tetanus-therapy and other remedy treatment necessary for the injury. For serious injuries, especially with several fingers involved or mangled hand, the first thing to do is to save that hand. Dip a clean towel or piece of cloth in clean ice cold water then used it to wrap the affected hand. Doing this, will control the bleeding and save the hand. Should there be a dismembered finger or limb, try to save it by dipping it in a jar of ice. Some centers are capable of micro vascular surgery; hence the limb may be saved. Regardless whether or not the patient receives the necessary first aid for his injuries, it is but wise to have the patient be examined in the emergency room.

This week's answer to our feature question is brought to you by MEDICard's accredited specialist in Manila Adventist Medical Center, Dr. Raul Chrizaldo Morena. Doc Rhoy, as he is commonly addressed by his patients, specializes in Emergency Medicine and has been in this field for over 15 years now. He is a graduate of Medicine from MCU-FDTMF Medical Center and took his residency for his specialization in Emergency Medicine at Makati Medical Center. He is affiliated with the Philippine Medical Association, Makati Medical Association, and the Philippine College of Emergency Medicine and Acute Care. He spends his free time playing basketball, weightlifting and doing any physical activities that would burn calories. Doc Rhoy also has a talent in painting and in writing poetry. MEDICard members may seek for his consultations at the ER Department of Manila Adventist Medical Center.

MEDICard's Medical Director, Dr. Nicky Montoya answers questions on health through the assistance and expertise of MEDICard's network of accredited specialists. Write to Dr. Nicky or E-mail him at inquiry@medicardphils.com for your inquiries on health matters.



Close gym encounters

From page C1

of persuasion could get her to stop the dangerous practice. In the end, we had to cancel her membership.

She wrote me an eight-page complaint letter. But I had to stand my ground. She was bound to have an accident or medical emergency. If she wouldn't listen to us, we'd rather things happen in some other gym, not ours.

Another client only became a member to keep an eye on his girlfriend. After walking on the treadmill at the slowest of paces (the only exercise he ever did), he would read a newspaper. Then, he began to feel really at home and would take a nap under the Smith machine with the paper covering his face (even snoring sometimes).

Celebrities

We quickly figured out that the more famous a celebrity, the more quiet and unassuming he/she was at the gym. The wannabes and those hoping-to-be-famous were the ones trying to call attention to themselves. I mean, what else would you call someone who runs on a treadmill with a cap and sunglasses on, except "trying hard"?

Wives and mistresses

The wife of a prominent public figure would work out in the morning and his mistress would come in the afternoon. We never found out if they knew what was going on or if this was their "civilized" modus vivendi. One thing's for sure, the man had some cheek keeping both women in the same vicinity.

Another time, a wife came to see me insisting that I kick out a member who she claimed was her husband's mistress. She wasn't too happy when I told her it was none of our business. After all, we were only in charge of our clients' fitness, not their marital affairs.

Treadmills

Treadmills can be dangerous machines. Powerful motors and moving belts are not for the clumsy or forgetful. For example, we had a client who bent down to tie his shoelaces and was promptly thrown off. Another woman bent down to pick up a water bottle that had fallen and off she went.

We had an older client who refused to wear her glasses until the day she kept pressing the wrong button and the treadmill sped up, faster than she could handle. In her panic, she forgot where the stop button was. She was hanging on to the handrails for dear life while shouting at the top of her lungs for help.

After that, her glasses were "glued" to her face.

Instructors

We had a male instructor who was always falling asleep sometimes right there in the gym standing up against a machine. We found out he was kept awake watching movies at night.

The problem was he was on the morning shift. We kept offering to move him to the afternoon but he always refused. We reluctantly had to let him go. Hopefully, he has changed his ways. If he hasn't, you may have seen him. He's the guy sleeping behind the cable column machine in your gym.

We had a female instructor whose biceps and six-pack abs were the envy of male and female members alike. This was back in the early '90s, when looking like Linda Hamilton of "Terminator" was all the rage.

I was quite naïve then about steroids so it took me two years after she resigned to discover that the secret to her much envied muscularity was anabolic steroid.

Yoga Manila will host Ashtanga workshops by Clay Horton, Jan. 6-13. Horton was a student of Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, guru of the Ashtanga yoga system, and the Greensufi. Call 0917-522-YOGA or e-mail yogamanila@gmail.com

Visit www.tinajuanfitness.info

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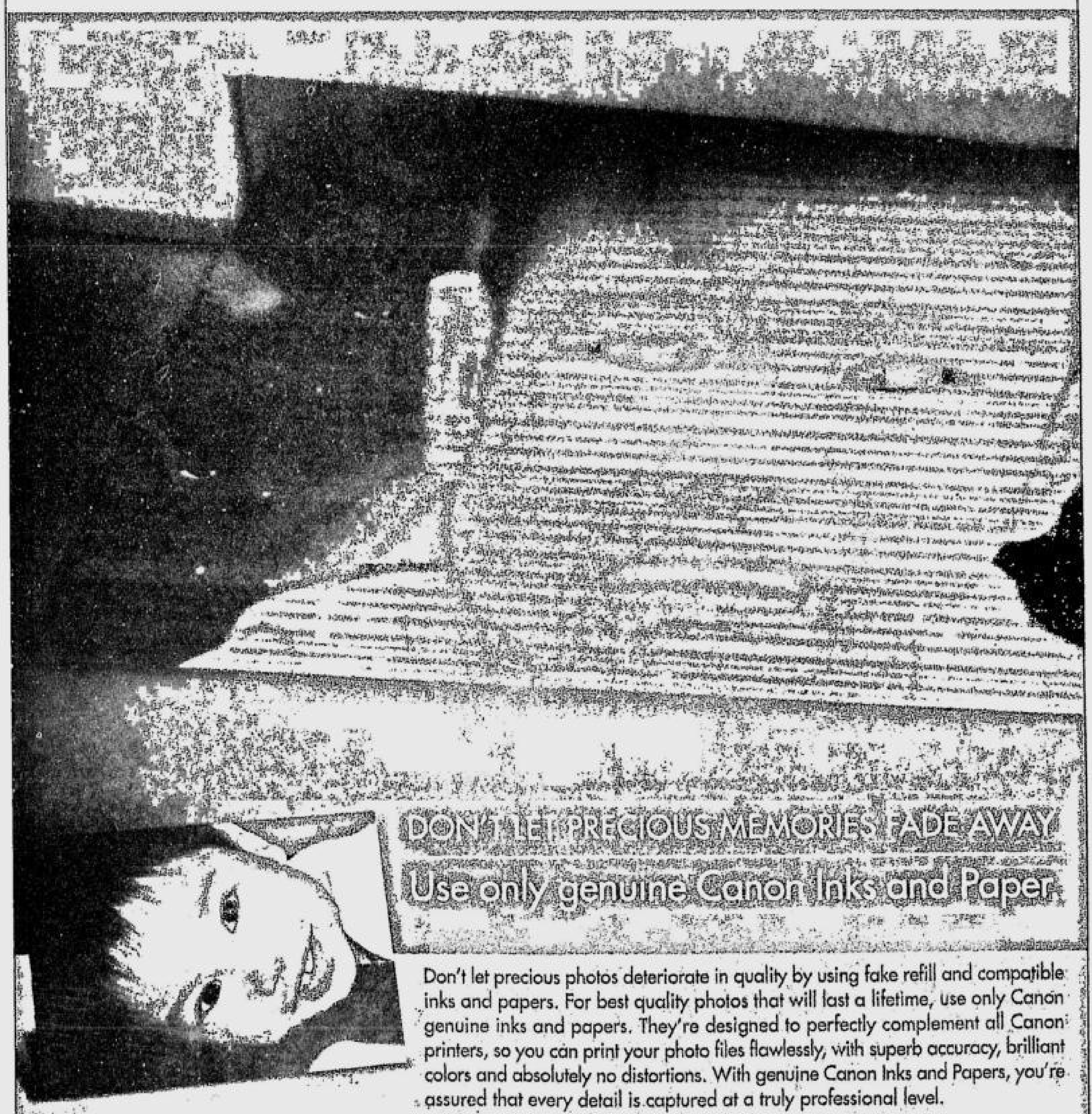
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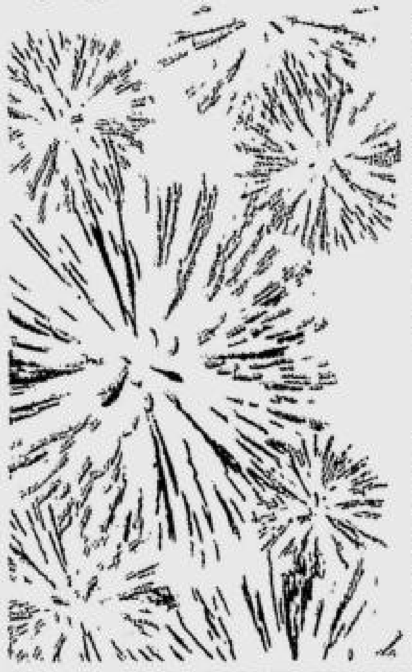

End the year with a big bang of shopping finds at great savings! Take advantage of the mallwide sale from December 26 to January 1 at all SM malls nationwide!

Hurry to the SM mall nearest your neighborhood and grab the items of your choice at awesome end-of-season markdowns. Remember, you only have today thru New Year's Day to shop, shop and save!

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SM City Fairview	- Dec. 30
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SM City Sta. Mesa	- Dec. 30
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SM City Sucat	- Dec. 29 & 30
SM City Bacoor	- Dec. 29 & 30

Provincial Malls

SM City Baguio, SM City Clark, SM City Marilao, SM City Sta. Rosa, SM Supercenter Molino, SM City Lipa, SM City Batangas, SM City Lucena	- Dec. 30
SM City Pampanga	- Dec. 30
SM City Dasmariñas	- Dec. 30
SM City Iloilo	- Dec. 30
SM City Cagayan de Oro	- Dec. 31

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ENTERTAINMENT

Editor **Emmie G. Velarde**

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CALM before the chaos. A scene from "Tsunami"

'Tsunami, The Aftermath'

HBO movie based on actual accounts about tragedy in Thailand

By Oliver M. Pulumbarit
Contributor

TAKE FIVE

THE NEW HBO TWO-PARTER "TSUNAMI, The Aftermath," while a fictional three-hour drama, was inspired by actual events and first-hand accounts of the tsunami that hit Thailand two years ago.

HOLDING on to dear life. Tsunami survivors recall scenarios like this.

Writer Abi Morgan sought to create a story that followed multiple perspectives to give a broader view of the catastrophe, so she met up with survivors, government officials, and families of victims as part of her research.

To show the tragedy's encompassing reach and the grief that hounded the victims, Morgan's script focused on eclectic characters—including some vacationing tourists, relief workers, journalists and native coastline residents. Actors Chiwetel Ejiofor ("Serenity"), Sophie Okonedo ("Hotel Rwanda"), Toni Collette ("The Sixth Sense") and Tim Roth ("Rob Roy"), among others, eventually came on board. Golden Globe nominations for Ejiofor, Okonedo and Collette's performances in the miniseries were recently announced.

Director Bharat Nalluri ("Life on Mars") revealed in a phone interview that he communicated with Thai NGOs, survivors and journalists as part of his research and that the project required a large crew of about 250, many of whom were Thai. The 50-day shoot proved to

TSUNAMI/ D3

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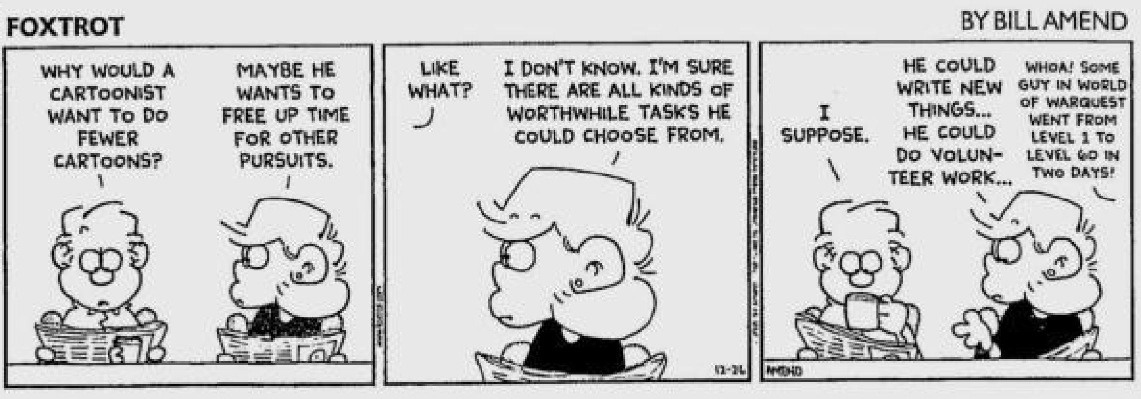
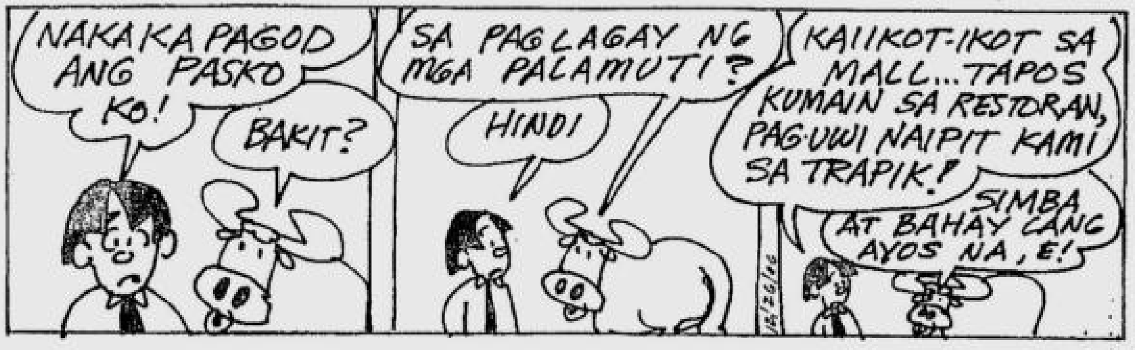
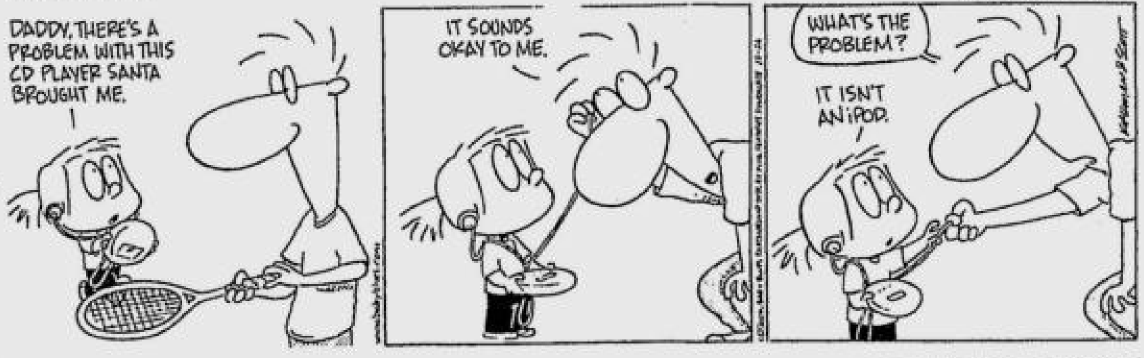
BY BILL AMEND


WHY WOULD A CARTOONIST WANT TO DO FEWER CARTOONS?
MAYBE HE WANTS TO FREE UP TIME FOR OTHER PURSUITS.
LIKE WHAT?
I DON'T KNOW. I'M SURE THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF WORTHWHILE TASKS HE COULD CHOOSE FROM.
I SUPPOSE.
HE COULD WRITE NEW THINGS... HE COULD DO VOLUNTEER WORK...
WHOA! SOME GUY IN WORLD OF WARQUEST WENT FROM LEVEL 1 TO LEVEL 60 IN TWO DAYS!
12-26
AMEND

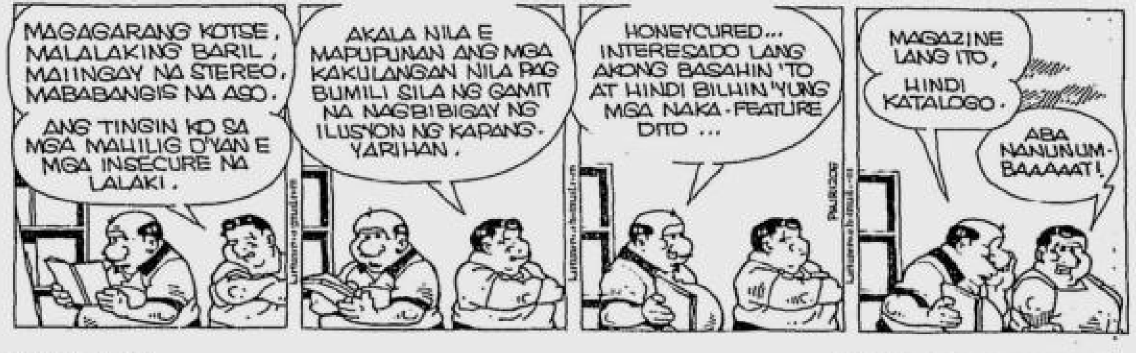
A. LIPIN
BY JESS ABRERA


NAKAKAPAGOD ANG PASKO KO!
BAKIT?
SA PAGLAGAY NG MGA PALAMUTI?
HINDI
KAIIKOT-IKOT SA MALL...TAPOS KUMAIN SA RESTORAN, PAG-UWI NAIPIT KAMI SA TRAPIK!
SIMBA AT BAHAY LANG AYOS NA, E!
12/26/06

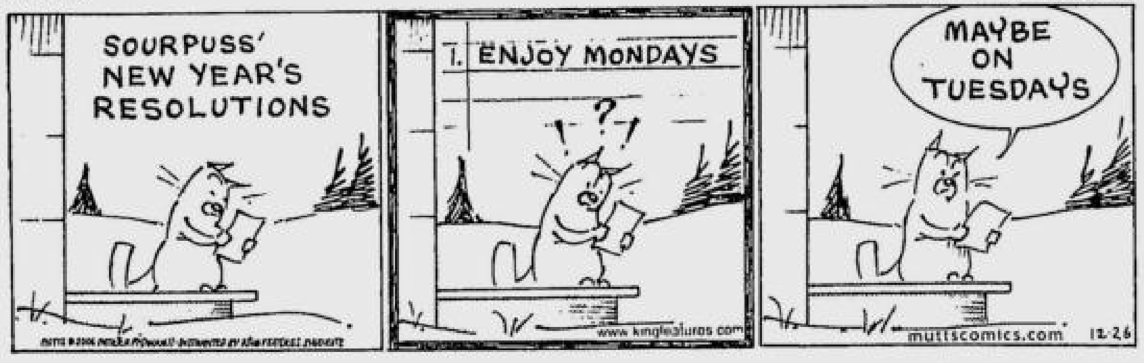
BABY BLUES
BY JERRY SCOTT


DADDY, THERE'S A PROBLEM WITH THIS CD PLAYER SANTA BROUGHT ME.
IT SOUNDS OKAY TO ME.
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
IT ISN'T AN iPOD.

PUGAD BABOY
BY P.M. JUNIOR


MAGAGARANG KOTSE, MALALAKING BARIL, MAIINGAY NA STEREO, MABABANGIS NA ASO.
ANG TINGIN KO SA MGA MAHILIG D'YAN E MGA INSECURE NA LALAKI.
AKALA NILA E MAPUPUNAN ANG MGA KAKULANGAN NILA PAG BUMILI SILA NG GAMIT NA NAGBIBIGAY NG ILUSYON NG KAPANGYARIHAN.
HONEYCURED... INTERESADO LANG AKONG BASAHIN 'TO AT HINDI BILHIN 'YUNG MGA NAKA-FEATURE DITO ...
MAGAZINE LANG ITO, HINDI KATALOGO.
ABA NANUNUMBAAAAAT!

MUTTS
BY PATRICK McDONNELL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1. ENJOY MONDAYS
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LOVEKNOTS
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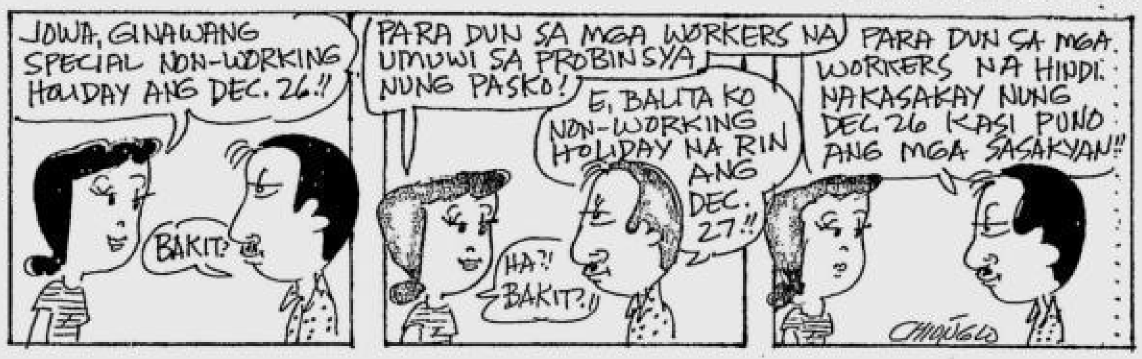
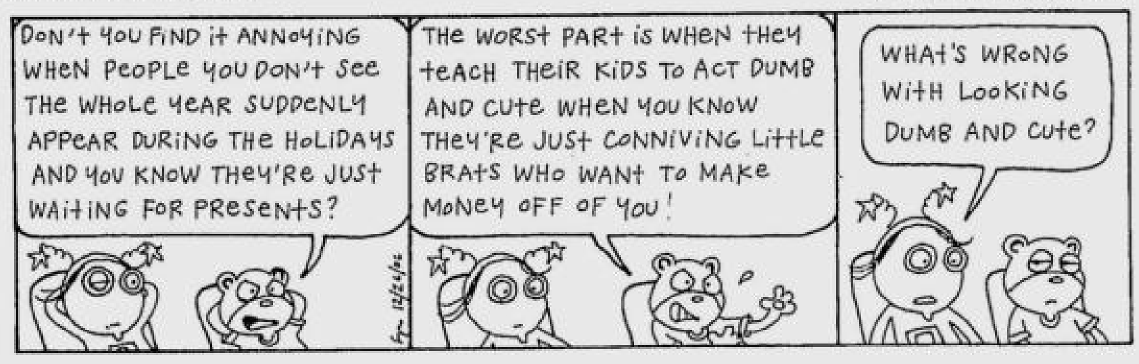
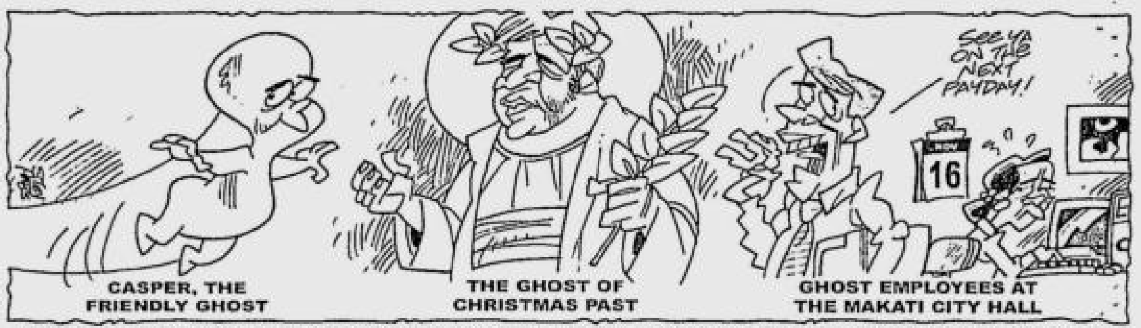

JOWA, GINAWANG SPECIAL NON-WORKING HOLIDAY ANG DEC. 26!!
BAKIT?
PARA DUN SA MGA WORKERS NA UMUWI SA PROBINSYA NUNG PASKO!
E, BALITA KO NON-WORKING HOLIDAY NA RIN ANG DEC. 27!!
HA?! BAKIT?!
PARA DUN SA MGA WORKERS NA HINDI NAKASAKAY NUNG DEC. 26 KASI PUNO ANG MGA SASAKYAN!!
CHIONGLO

ATOMO AND WEBOY
BY LYRA GARCELLANO

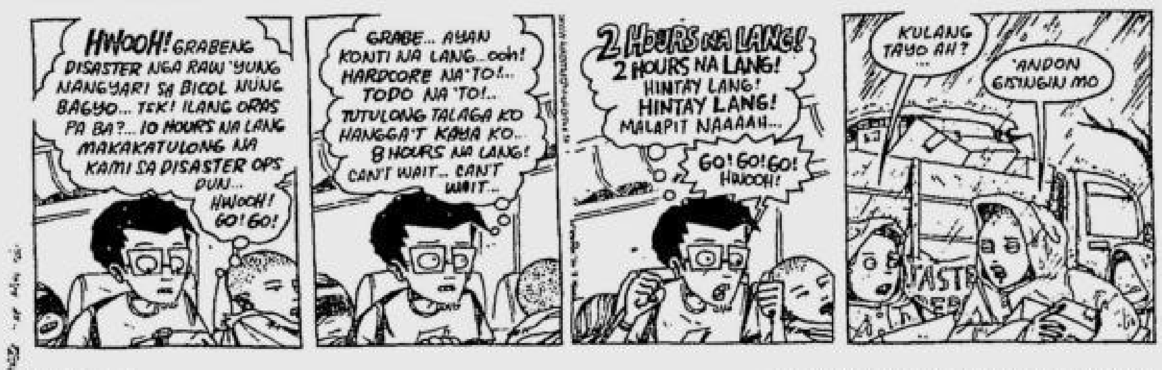

Don't you find it annoying when people you don't see the whole year suddenly appear during the holidays and you know they're just waiting for presents?
The worst part is when they teach their kids to act dumb and cute when you know they're just conniving little brats who want to make money off of you!
What's wrong with looking dumb and cute?
12/26/06

DIVINE COMEDY
BY STEVEN PABALINAS

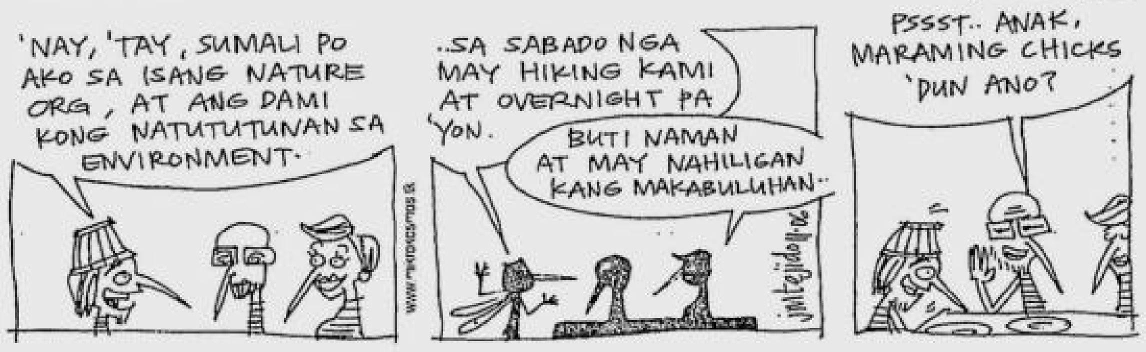

SEE YA ON THE NEXT PAYDAY!
16
CASPER, THE FRIENDLY GHOST
THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST
GHOST EMPLOYEES AT THE MAKATI CITY HALL

AVAILABLE NA RIN ANG DIVINE COMEDY COMPILATION SA NATIONAL BOOKSTORE AT PHILIPPINE CHRISTIAN BOOKSTORE

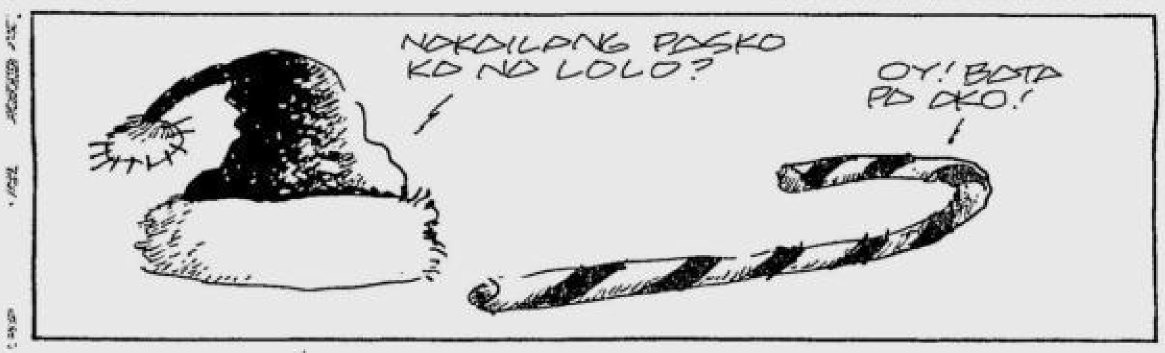
KIKO MACHINE
BY MANIX ABRERA


HWOOH! GRABENG DISASTER NGA RAW 'YUNG NANGYARI SA BICOL NUNG BAGYO... TSK! ILANG ORAS PA BA?... 10 HOURS NA LANG MAKAKATULONG NA KAMI SA DISASTER OPS DUN...
HWOOH! GO! GO!
GRABE... AYAN KONTI NA LANG...ooh! HARDCORE NA 'TO!.. TODO NA 'TO!.. TUTULONG TALAGA KO HANGGA'T KAYA KO.. 8 HOURS NA LANG! CAN'T WAIT... CAN'T WAIT...
2 HOURS NA LANG! 2 HOURS NA LANG! HINTAY LANG! HINTAY LANG! MALAPIT NAAAAH...
GO! GO! GO! HWOOH!
KULANG TAYO AH? ...
'ANDON GISINGIN MO

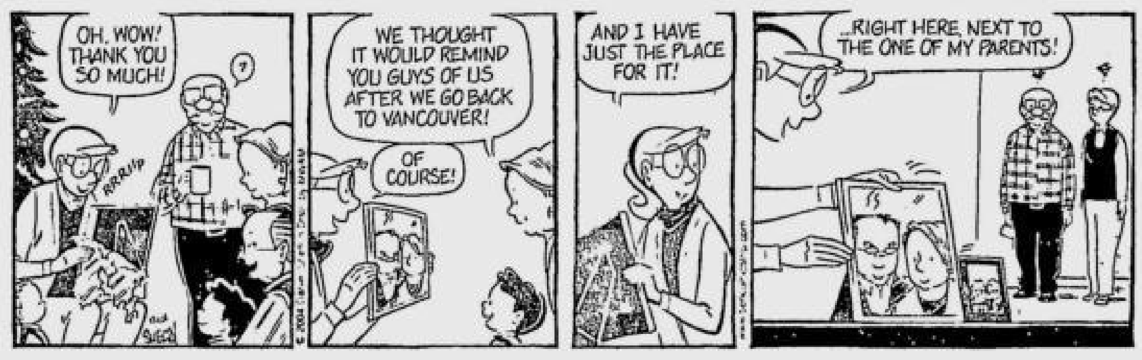
MIKROKOSMOS
BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


'NAY, 'TAY, SUMALI PO AKO SA ISANG NATURE ORG, AT ANG DAMI KONG NATUTUTUNAN SA ENVIRONMENT.
..SA SABADO NGA MAY HIKING KAMI AT OVERNIGHT PA 'YON.
BUTI NAMAN AT MAY NAHILIGAN KANG MAKABULUHAN.
PSSST.. ANAK, MARAMING CHICKS 'DUN ANO?
jmtejido

TULDOK
BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


NAKAILANG PASKO KO NA LOLO?
OY! BATA PA AKO!

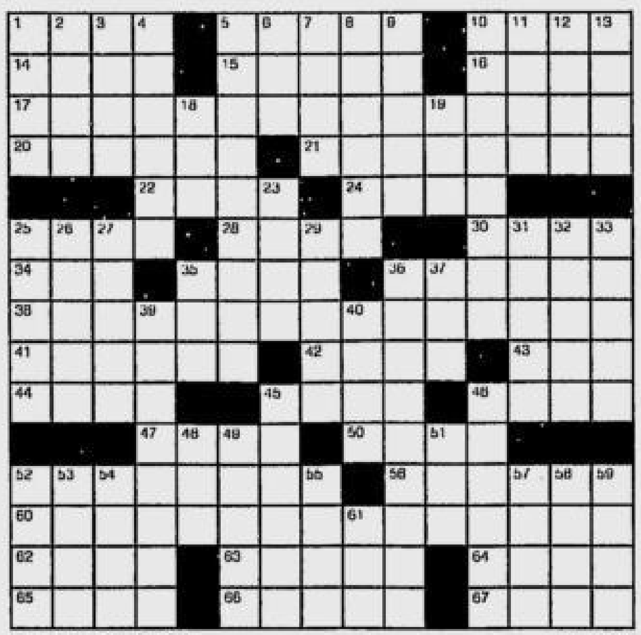
BEN
BY DANIEL SHELTON


OH, WOW! THANK YOU SO MUCH!
RRRIP
?
WE THOUGHT IT WOULD REMIND YOU GUYS OF US AFTER WE GO BACK TO VANCOUVER!
OF COURSE!
AND I HAVE JUST THE PLACE FOR IT!
...RIGHT HERE, NEXT TO THE ONE OF MY PARENTS!

DAILY CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Caen neighbor
5 Door columns
10 Demolish
14 Ringlike earring
15 Actress Aimee
16 Do one's bidding
17 You're welcome!
20 Islamic temple
21 London lift
22 Heavenly bear
24 List-ending abbr.
25 Competent
28 Zip about
30 Little devils
34 Tony winner Caldwell
35 Used to be
36 Spanish lady
38 You're welcome!
41 Mil. alert state protocol
42 On the level?
43 High tennis ball
44 Irish New Age artist
45 Reply of the accused
46 On one's guard
47 Beatles' meter maid
50 Hook's aide
52 Beach property
56 Cylinder head valve
60 You're welcome!
62 DEA agent
63 Muse of poetry
64 First garden party?
65 Eye problem
66 "Lay Lady Lay" singer
67 Novelist Jaffe

DOWN
1 Leveling wedge
2 "Hold the Line" band
3 Depressions
4 Without luster
5 "Giant" star
6 Take your pick
7 Be in low spirits
8 Metal projectile
9 Sport with clay pigeons
10 Russell of "His Girl Friday"
11 Border on
12 Love, to Venus or Selena
13 Rubbernecker
18 Big __, CA
19 Artie's Gardner
23 50-and-over grp.
25 Nitrogen-based compound
26 Julie of "Boston Legal"
27 Ivy-covered, say
29 Drive away
31 Simoleons
32 Rap-sheet entry
33 Shared a bench
35 Relative pronoun
36 Pressing need
37 Long time
39 Pacino film
40 __ St. Laurent
45 Kitchen closet
46 Hotel suite feature
48 Taxing grp.
49 Added shading
51 "Dune" composer
52 Moral errors
53 Coup d'__
54 Cockeyed
55 Volcano near Manila
57 Ray of "Pat and Mike"
58 Actor Edmund
59 Austen novel
61 School fund-raising grp.


1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67

By James E. Buell
Edgewater, FL
12/26/06

Monday's Puzzle Solved

D	A	V	■	M	I	S	C	■	S	A	M	U	E	L
A	M	I	■	U	N	T	O	■	G	R	U	N	G	Y
V	O	X	■	S	P	A	M	■	D	A	S	H	E	R
I	C	E	S	K	A	T	E	R	■	■	L	I	R	E
D	O	N	N	E	R	■	T	I	D	B	I	T	■	■
■	■	■	A	T	T	N	■	P	R	A	N	C	E	R
W	A	S	P	■	■	A	S	P	I	C	■	H	R	A
E	R	A	■	R	U	D	O	L	P	H	■	E	M	P
B	I	X	■	A	S	I	D	E	■	■	A	D	A	S
B	L	I	T	Z	E	N	■	S	E	W	N	■	■	■
■	■	F	R	E	R	E	S	■	D	A	N	C	E	R
A	F	R	O	■	■	S	A	F	E	H	O	U	S	E
C	L	A	U	S	E	■	N	A	N	O	■	P	S	I
R	A	G	T	A	G	■	T	R	I	O	■	I	A	N
E	N	E	S	C	O	■	A	R	C	S	■	D	Y	S

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12/26/06

HOROSCOPE

YOU BORN TODAY: You're careful, methodical and thorough in everything you do. You like to plan ahead. You leave very little to chance. You have your own unique ideas about how to do things, and you're not afraid to buck the prevailing standards of the day. (You can do this because you're courageous.) Your year ahead will focus strongly on relationships and partnerships.

Birthdate of: Ozzie Smith, baseball shortstop; Jared Leto, actor; Koji Morimoto, animated-film director.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): You might have to take a strong stand with someone connected with the government or a large institution. Just make sure you don't cut off your nose to spite your face. (Then no one wins.)

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): It's possible to have conflict with a friend or a member of a group about shared possessions or who is responsible for what today. Don't make a big deal about things. (Keep it light.)

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): You might cross swords with bosses, parents, teachers or authority figures in your life today. Make sure that this is something worth fighting about. (If not, I suggest you drop the matter.)

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): Heated discussions about religion or politics could be pointless today. You cannot reason others out of a position they were not reasoned into in the first place.

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Disagreements about responsibilities for children or matters connected with sports are possible today. Don't let your emotions get the better of you

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): Partners and family members could be irksome today. Remember: Patience is the antidote to anger. (And anger serves no purpose other than to make everyone miserable.)

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): You might disagree with coworkers about how to improve something today. Perhaps you will have to agree to disagree. It's a civilized approach

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): Emotions are stifled today, and jealousy arises very easily. Beware the green-eyed monster. Actually, this feeling will pass very quickly; therefore, do not act on it today.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Family differences could arise today. Consider this an opportunity to demonstrate grace under pressure. After all, family is forever.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): You might feel annoyed with someone (especially a sibling) and not even know why. Try to let this moment pass. Wait until you feel differently to discuss this. You want solutions, not conflict.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): Petty differences with a friend or a group about money or possessions might exist today. It's curious how small annoyances are often more irksome than large ones. (Go figure.)

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Be patient with bosses, parents, teachers and VIPs. Voicing your disapproval is not in your best interests. Remember what your long-term objectives are.

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku
by Dave Green

	9	6	4				1	
4						7		8
	8			7				3
			7		8			4
		9				6		
8			2		1			
5				3			2	
3		4						9
	6				2	8	3	

Difficulty Level ★★
12/26

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HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

9	7	6	2	5	3	4	8	1
8	5	3	6	1	4	7	2	9
1	2	4	9	8	7	6	5	3
3	8	1	5	7	6	9	4	2
4	6	5	1	2	9	3	7	8
7	9	2	3	4	8	1	6	5
5	1	7	4	3	2	8	9	6
2	4	9	8	6	1	5	3	7
6	3	8	7	9	5	2	1	4

Difficulty Level ★

‘Tsunami, The Aftermath’

From page D1

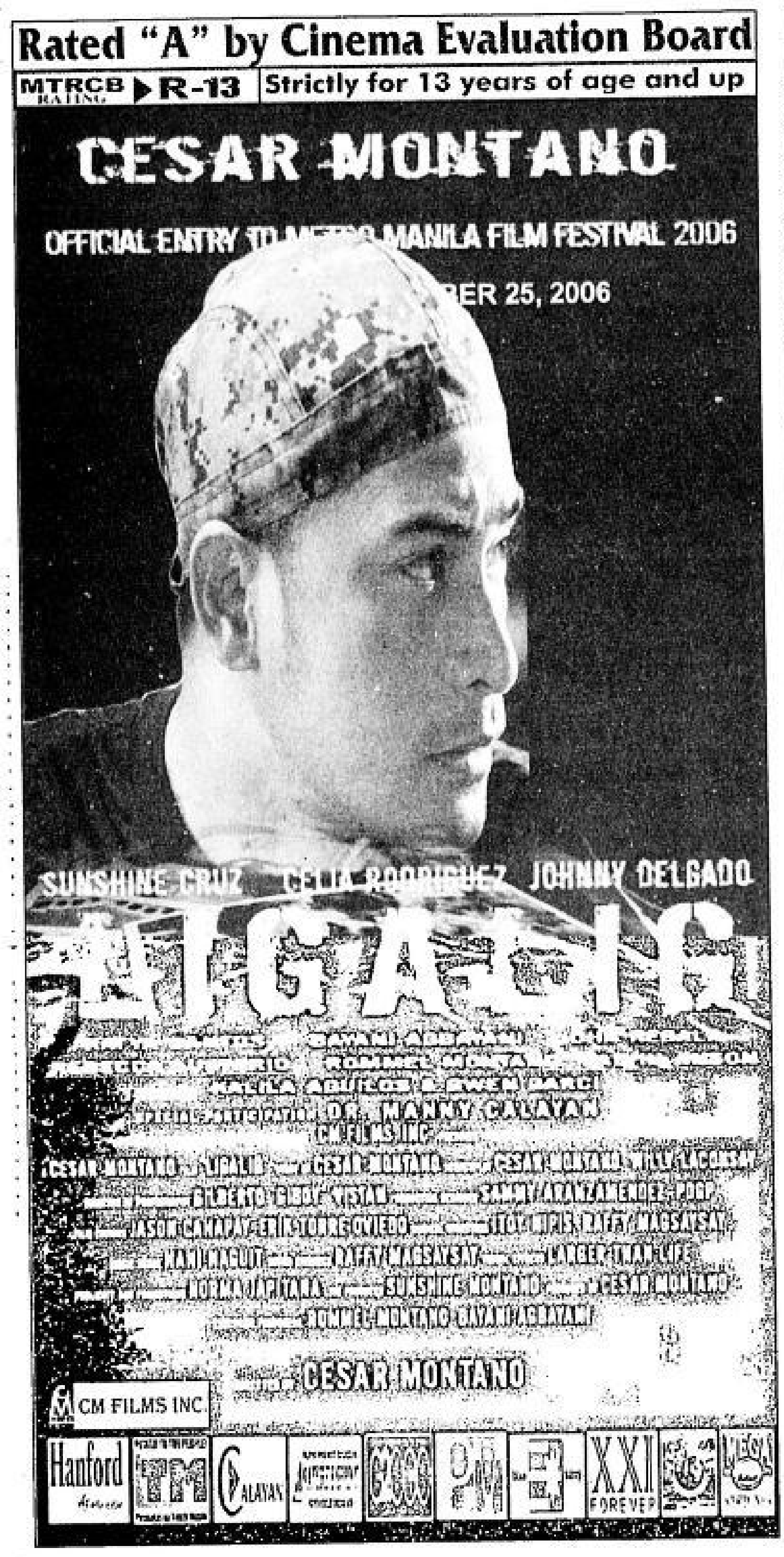
be a profound experience for the filmmaker.

Was it difficult to re-create the tsunami scenes—the wave and the subsequent damage—and create fictional scenes?

The amazing thing about Thailand is that the infrastructure and the tourist industry are both back. It was quite incredible to arrive back there and feel [like] it had hardly been hit on an infrastructure level.

It was difficult, it was a big job, but we were clever at it. Our core mantra was to be very truthful and real so we didn't want to turn it into a Hollywood movie. We watched a lot of

TSUNAMI/D4


Rated “A” by Cinema Evaluation Board
MTRCB RATING R-13 Strictly for 13 years of age and up
CESAR MONTANO
OFFICIAL ENTRY TO METRO MANILA FILM FESTIVAL 2006
ER 25, 2006
SUNSHINE CRUZ CELIA RODRIGUEZ JOHNNY DELGADO
LIGALIG
CESAR MONTANO
CM FILMS INC.
Hanford
XXI FOREVER

MTRCB RATING PG-13 Children below 13 yrs. old will only be allowed if accompanied by a parent or adult
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MARK LAPID as Julio Valiente
MAYNARD LAPID as Zigomar
TATLONG BARAHA
PHOEMELA BARANDA GIRLIE SEVILLA JACKIE RICE
BEARWIN MEILY AND MONSOUR DEL ROSARIO
Violett
LITO LAPID MARK LAPID VIOLETA SEVILLA TOTO NATIVIDAD
ML FILMS
Jollibee
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THEATER ZONE
DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND-EX
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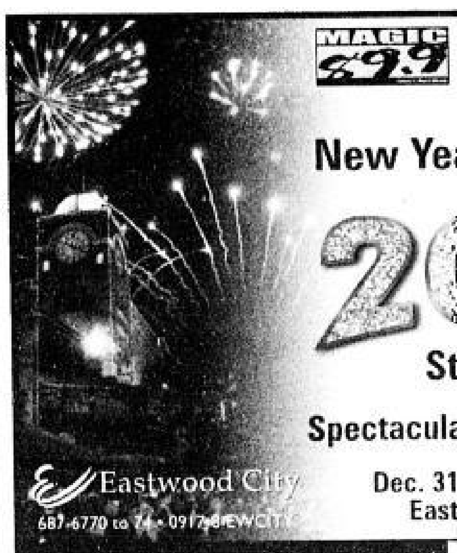
1	ENTENG KABISOTE 3	6	MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
2	KASAL KASALI KASALO	7	MANO PO 5
3	LIGALIG	8	SUPER NOYPI
4	ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH	9	ENTENG KABISOTE 3
5	TATLONG BARAHA	10	SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

For inquiries, call 681-5251 MOVIES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE
Sta. Lucia East Grand Mall Marcos High-way Cainta Rizal


MAGIC 89.9 & Eastwood City present
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For inquiries, call: 687-6963
GUARANTEED SEATS
MOVIES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

1	LIGALIG	2:00, 4:15, 6:30, 8:45, 10:55	R-13
2	SUPER NOYPI	12:50, 3:15, 5:50, 8:25, 11:00	G
3	ENTENG KABISOTE 3	12:50, 3:15, 5:50, 8:25, 11:00	G
4	SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	1:35, 4:30, 7:25, 10:20	PG-13

glorietta GREENBELT ALABANG TOWN AYALA CENTER CEBU MARKET! MARKET! Ayala Malls Lovemall

AT THE CINEMAS THX
Reserve your tickets by texting SURESEATS GB3 or SURESEATS G4 to 2333 (Globe) or 211 (Smart) or log on to www.sureseats.com for web reservations.
Movie schedules may change without prior notice. For verification, please call 729 7777

G1 GLORIETTA 1	1 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3	3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH	4 LIGALIG
G4 GLORIETTA 4	1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO	2 LIGALIG	3 THX TATLONG BARAHA GUARANTEED SEATS	
	4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA	5 MANO PO 5	6 SUPER NOYPI	7 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8
GB1 GREENBELT 1	1 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH	2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3		
GB3 GREENBELT 3	1 THX SUPER NOYPI GUARANTEED SEATS	2 THX MANO PO 5 GUARANTEED SEATS		
	3 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA GUARANTEED SEATS	4 TATLONG BARAHA GUARANTEED SEATS	5 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO GUARANTEED SEATS	
ATC ALABANG TOWN CENTER	1 THX MATAKOT KA SA KARMA GUARANTEED SEATS	2 MANO PO 5		
	3 SUPER NOYPI	4 ENTENG KABISOTE 3	5 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	
ACC AYALA CENTER CEBU	1 SUPER NOYPI	2 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	3 ENTENG KABISOTE 3	4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
M2 MARKET! MARKET!	1 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3		
	3 SUPER NOYPI	4 MANO PO 5	5 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH	

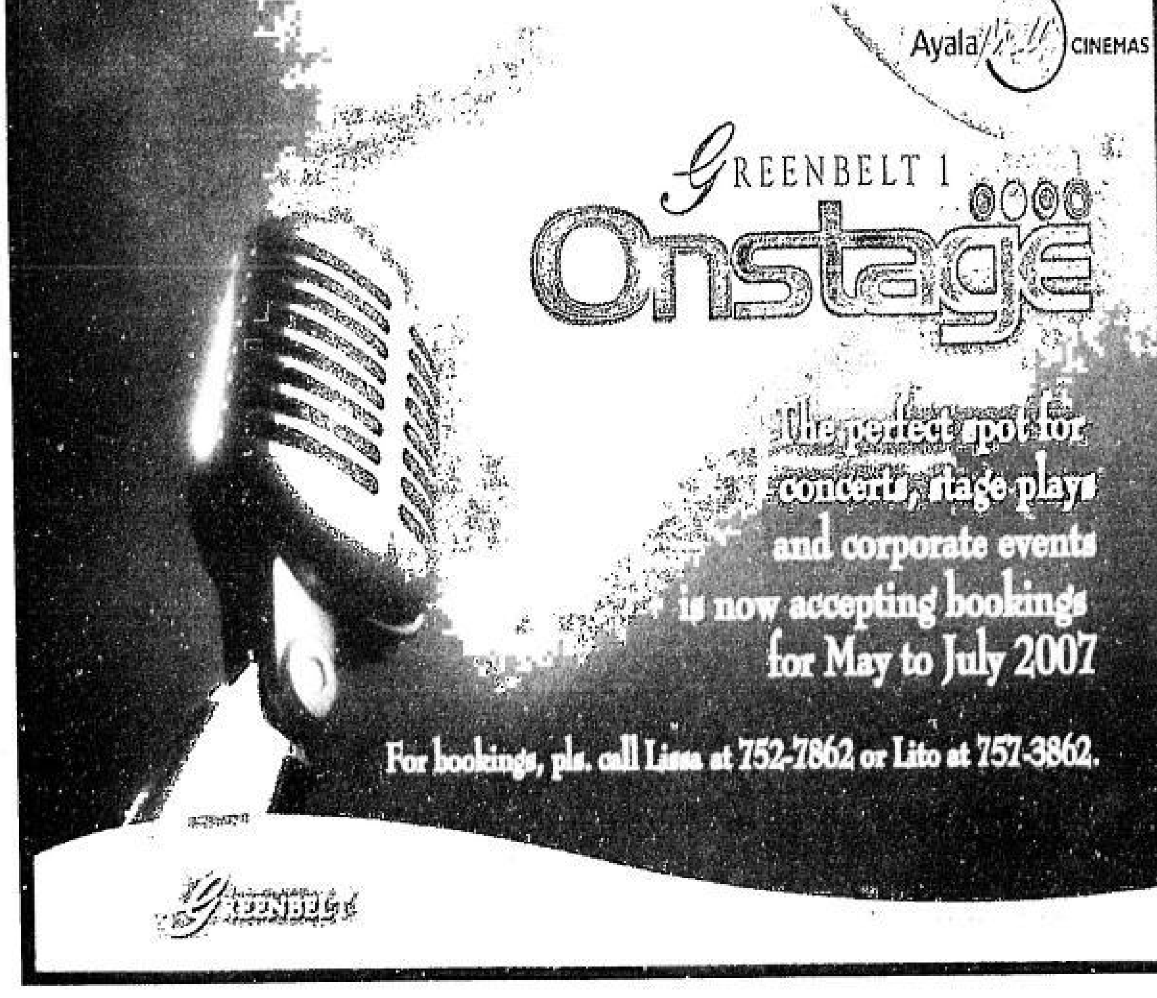
At the Activity Center
Customer Service text hotline: 0917 6095900
Customer Service Numbers: Glorietta - 752 7272; from 10am to 9pm
Greenbelt - 757 4853; from 11am to 9pm
Alabang Town Center - 842 2782; from 10am to 8pm
Ayala Center Cebu - (032) 231 5342 loc 324
Market! Market! - 886 7519

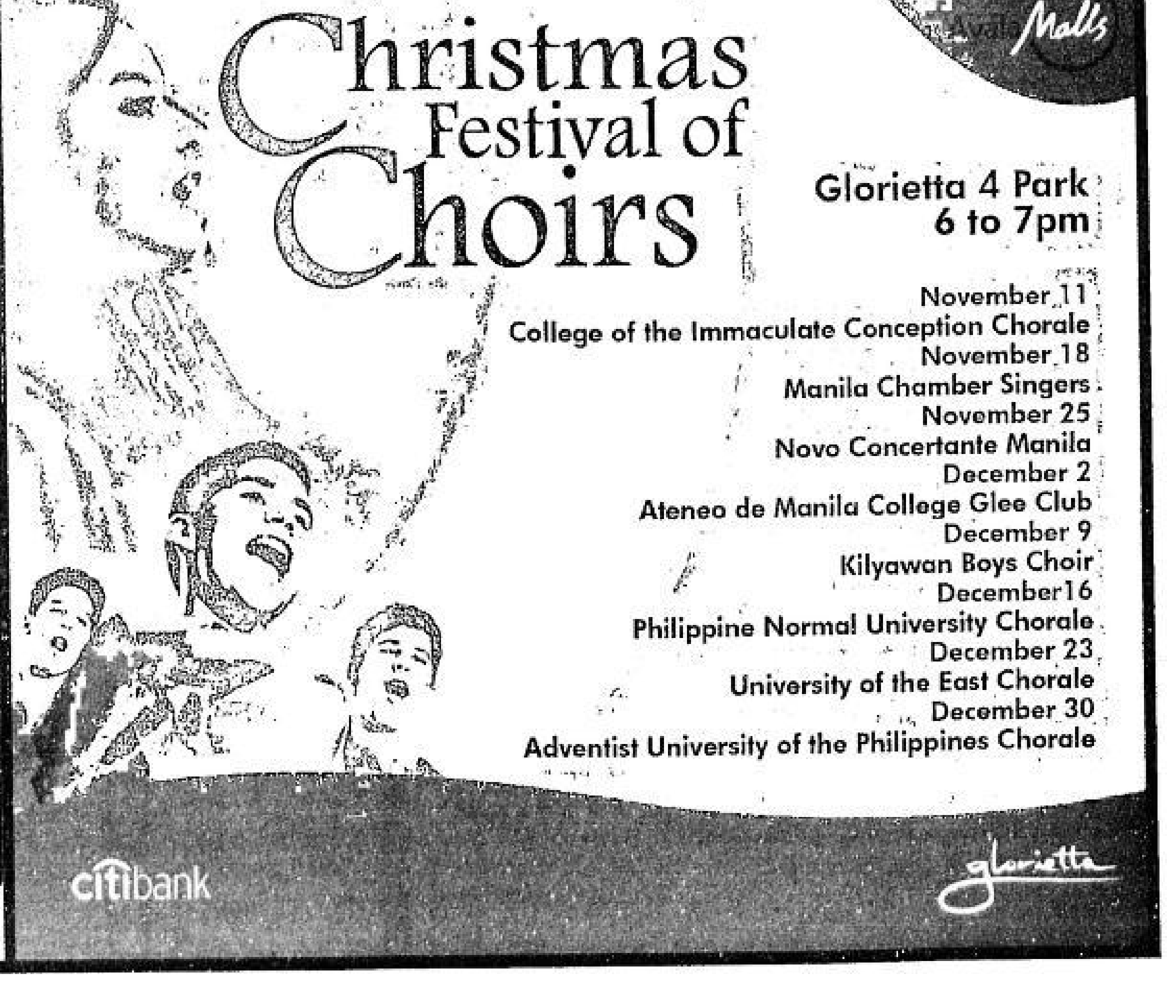
GLORIETTA	ALABANG TOWN CENTER
Globe Event December 22 to 24, 2006	Anson Exhibit December 11 to 22, 2006
AYALA CENTER CEBU	MARKET! MARKET!
Stepstones Learning Center Christmas Presentation December 21, 2006	Radyoke Challenge: Grand Finals December 30, 2006

GREENBELT — Holiday Harmonies with the Philippine Madrigal Singers
December 23, 2006

GREENBELT 1 Onstage — ONSTAGE - The perfect spot for concerts, stage plays & corporate events is now accepting bookings for May to July 2007
For bookings, pls. call Lissa at 752-7862 or Lito at 757-3862

Ayala MUSEUM — 19th - 20th Century Philippine Art from Ayala Museum Collection
On-going until January 2007
For inquiries, please call 757-7117 to 21 or visit www.ayalamuseum.org


Ayala Malls CINEMAS
GREENBELT 1
Onstage
The perfect spot for concerts, stage plays and corporate events is now accepting bookings for May to July 2007
For bookings, pls. call Lissa at 752-7862 or Lito at 757-3862.
GREENBELT


Ayala Malls
Christmas Festival of Choirs
Glorietta 4 Park
6 to 7pm
November 11
College of the Immaculate Conception Chorale
November 18
Manila Chamber Singers
November 25
Novo Concertante Manila
December 2
Ateneo de Manila College Glee Club
December 9
Kilyawan Boys Choir
December 16
Philippine Normal University Chorale
December 23
University of the East Chorale
December 30
Adventist University of the Philippines Chorale
citibank
glorietta

ROBINSONS MOVIEWORLD CINEMAS MOVIE GUIDE

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MOVIES/SCHEDULES/PRICES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

GALLERIA 632-9116

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3 • THX
2 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO
3 LIGALIG
4 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
5 TATLONG BARAHA
6 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
7 MANO PO 5
8 SUPER NOYPI
9 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
10 SHAKE, RATLLE AND ROLL 8

ERMITA 336-7809 to 12

1 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO
2 LIGALIG
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
4 TATLONG BARAHA
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
6 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
7 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8

METRO EAST 682-8193/682-8199

1 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO
2 LIGALIG
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
4 TATLONG BARAHA
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
6 MANO PO 5
7 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
8 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8

NOVALICHES 935-3231/938-3229-30

1 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8
2 SUPER NOYPI
3 MANO PO 5
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 TATLONG BARAHA
6 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
7 LIGALIG
8 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO

CITISQUARE MALABON 288-2575

1 SUPER NOYPI
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 RESERVE
4 RESERVE

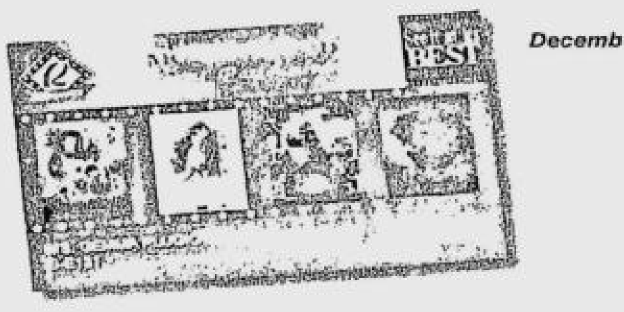
PIONEER 887-5378

1 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
4 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH

Watch and Win an ALL-YEAR-ROUND Robinsons Movieworld Cinema Card!!!

Robinsons Movieworld will give away one (1) cinema card to the 100 cash prize winners of the "Cash sa Pelikula" raffle promo provided that they have watched at least 3 movies at any Robinsons Movieworld Branch.

PROMO PERIOD:
December 25, 2006 to January 05, 2007



NCAP MBC MMDA

See Posters for more details

Per DTI-NCR Permit #5517, Series of 2006

STA. ROSA (049) 837-0907

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO
3 MANO PO 5
4 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8
5 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH

LIPA (043) 757-3664 (043) 312-5870

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO
3 MANO PO 5
4 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8
5 SUPER NOYPI

DASMARINAS (046) 852-2125 (046) 416-4332

1 MANO PO 5
2 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO

ANGELES (045) 892-2346

1 MANO PO 5
2 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8
3 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
4 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO

IMUS (046) 875-3838 (046) 471-8188

1 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
5 LIGALIG
6 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO

STARMILLS (045) 875-1927 (045) 961-5270

1 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 MANO PO 5
5 LIGALIG
6 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO

BACOLOD (034) 441-0463 (034) 441-0459

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO
3 MANO PO 5
4 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8
5 SUPER NOYPI
6 THE NATIVITY STORY

ILOILO (033) 338-8070.

1 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
2 TATLONG BARAHA
3 MANO PO 5
4 SUPER NOYPI
5 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
6 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8

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LORNA TOLENTINO
GINA PAREÑO
BOOTS ANSON-ROA
RICHARD GUTIERREZ
ANGEL LOCSIN
我愛你
MANO PO 5
REGAL ENTERTAINMENT INC.

MANO PO 5

Charity (Angel Locsin) is bound by her strict family traditions to only wed someone of pure Chinese ancestry. Despite of that, Charity still continues her relationship with Nathan (Richard Gutierrez), who proves himself to his family by always making an effort to reach out and to learn about her culture and language.

32nd Metro Manila Film Festival – Philippines 2006

我
愛
你

NOW SHOWING at SM Cinema nationwide

METRO MANILA

SM MALL OF ASIA 556-0104

IMAX
T-REX IN 3D
11:00AM 12:15PM 4:00PM 5:15PM
Admission Price P200
HAPPY FEET IN 2D
6:30PM
Matinee Fee- P200 Primetime Fee- P250
SUPERMAN RETURNS 3D
9:00PM Admission Price P300

1 LIGALIG
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 MANO PO 5
6 ENTENG KABISOTE 3

PREMIERE CINEMA
SUPER NOYPI

CENTERSTAGE
SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

PODIUM
CINEMA 1
ENTENG KABISOTE 3
CINEMA 2
KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
633-8976

SM NORTH EDSA 929-5452

1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 MANO PO 5
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
5 LIGALIG
6 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
7 TATLONG BARAHA
8 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
9 MANO PO 5
10 SUPER NOYPI
11 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
12 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

SM MEGACINEMA 633-1901

1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 LIGALIG
3 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
4 MANO PO 5
5 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
6 TATLONG BARAHA
7 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
8 MANO PO 5
9 SUPER NOYPI
10 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
11 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
12 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

SM CITY FAIRVIEW 935-0749

1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 LIGALIG
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
4 TATLONG BARAHA
5 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
6 MANO PO 5
7 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
8 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
9 MANO PO 5
10 SUPER NOYPI
11 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
12 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

SM CITY STA. MESA 716-1416

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 LIGALIG
4 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
5 TATLONG BARAHA
6 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
7 MANO PO 5
8 SUPER NOYPI
9 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
10 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

SM CITY SAN LAZARO 786-2488

1 LIGALIG
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 MANO PO 5
6 SUPER NOYPI

SM CITY SOUTHMALL 806-6888

1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 LIGALIG
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
4 TATLONG BARAHA
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
6 MANO PO 5
7 SUPER NOYPI
8 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
9 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

SM CITY BICUTAN 776-3055

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

SM CITY MANILA 523-9240

1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 LIGALIG
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
4 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
5 TATLONG BARAHA
6 MANO PO 5
7 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
8 MANO PO 5
9 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
10 SUPER NOYPI
11 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
12 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

SM CITY DASMARINAS (046)4323201-04

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 MANO PO 5
4 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH

SM VALENZUELA 293-3917

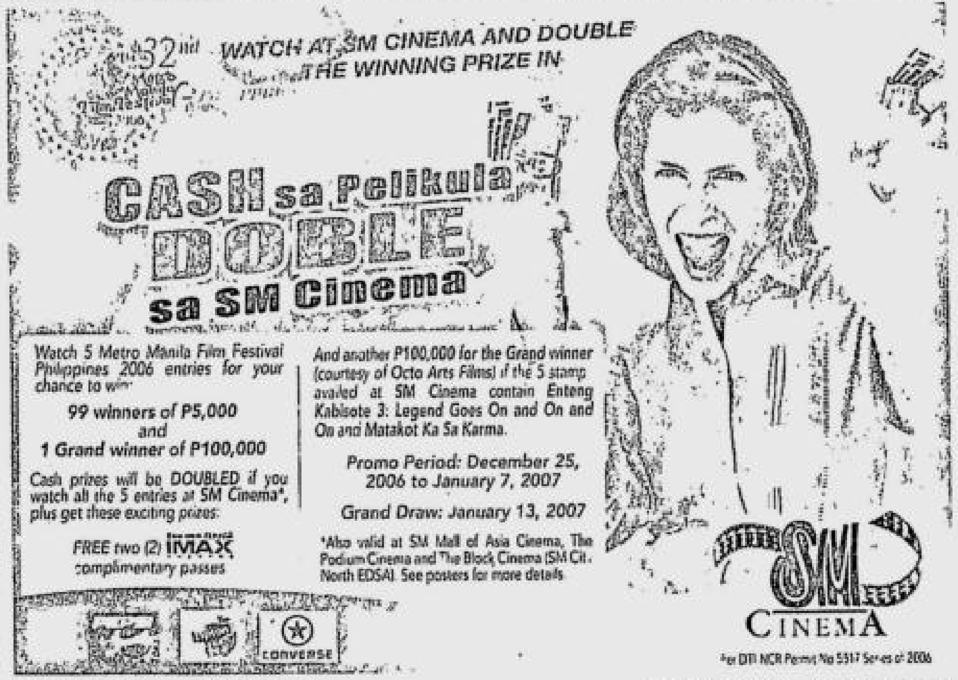
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 LIGALIG .
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
4 TATLONG BARAHA

SM CITY SUCAT 829-4975

1 LIGALIG
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
3 MANO PO 5
4 SUPER NOYPI

movietime PROMO

Watch and Win at SM Cinema



WATCH AT SM CINEMA AND DOUBLE THE WINNING PRIZE IN

CASH sa Pelikula DOBLE sa SM Cinema

Watch 5 Metro Manila Film Festival Philippines 2006 entries for your chance to win

99 winners of P5,000
and
1 Grand winner of P100,000

Cash prizes will be DOUBLED if you watch all the 5 entries at SM Cinema, plus get these exciting prizes:*

FREE two (2) IMAX complimentary passes

And another P100,000 for the Grand winner (courtesy of Octo Arts Films) if the 5 stamp availed at SM Cinema contain Enteng Kabisote 3: Legend Goes On and On and On and Matakot Ka Sa Karma.

Promo Period: December 25, 2006 to January 7, 2007

Grand Draw: January 13, 2007

**Also valid at SM Mall of Asia Cinema, The Podium Cinema and The Block Cinema (SM Cit. North EDSA). See posters for more details*

SM CINEMA

Per DTI NCR Permit No 5517 Series of 2006

LUZON

SM CITY BACOOR (046)417-3868

1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 MANO PO 5
6 SUPER NOYPI
7 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
8 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

SM CITY CLARK (045)625-5844-45

1 MANO PO 5
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 SUPER NOYPI
5 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
6 TATLONG BARAHA

SM CITY MARILAO (044)9332013-17

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 MANO PO 5

SM CITY BATANGAS 885-6401-04

1 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
4 MANO PO 5

SM CITY PAMPANGA (045)9637081-85

1 SUPER NOYPI
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
5 LIGALIG
6 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

SM CIY LIPA (043) 756-7925

1 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 TATLONG BARAHA

SM CITY LUCENA (042)7108977-80

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 MANO PO 5
3 LIGALIG
4 TATLONG BARAHA

SM CITY BAGUIO (074)6197838-39

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
3 LIGALIG
4 TATLONG BARAHA

SM SUPERCENTER MOLINO (046)474-3160

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 SUPER NOYPI
3 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
4 MANO PO 5

SM CITY STA. ROSA (049)5341265-66

1 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
3 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

VISAYAS MINDANAO

SM CITY CEBU (032)231-3876

1 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 MANO PO 5
5 TATLONG BARAHA
6 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
7 LIGALIG
8 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

SM CITY ILOILO (033)3209422

1 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
2 SUPER NOYPI
3 MANO PO 5
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 TATLONG BARAHA
6 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
7 LIGALIG
8 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

SM CITY DAVAO (082)2976998

1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 MANO PO 5
6 HAPPY FEET

SM CITY CAGAYAN (088)859-2884

1 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
2 MANO PO 5
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 ENTENG KABISOTE 3

SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

*FOR MORE INFORMATION ON MOVIE LISTING, MTRCB RATING, SCREENING SCHEDULES AND THE LATEST HAPPENINGS AT SM CINEMA

'Tsunami, The Aftermath'

From page D3

news footage from the time, talked to people who had been there. They walked through our set and said this is what it was like or this wasn't what it was like. And we were very, very respectful of what actually happened.

How is this experience different for you as a filmmaker, and what attracted you to the project?

If you look at my recent past effort, it's much more genre-driven. It's much more fantastical. "MI5" and "Hustle" are kind of unreal worlds and they're great fun to do as a filmmaker because you can actually imagine and create your own world and there are no rules.

What's interesting about "Tsunami" is that it is based on facts and reality and that it's very truthful and honest; it was a piece that would allow me to explore how human beings inter-existed in the real world, something I haven't been given the chance to do before and that's what attracted me. Every director wants to explore the human condition.

Was it easy to work with this cast?

Yes, it was. We were all worried about doing something about a tsunami. Before we read the script and were approached to do this film, we all felt it was too early, it's too soon, or it's some disaster movie where everyone's running around and saving each other. And when you read Abi's script, you realize it's really about the human beings caught in the aftermath of the disaster. And it's about how the global response was, and how we could possibly do things next time. Really, in the end, what was key was not showing any blame or reproach and maybe learning lessons from it. Once the actors read that, they knew it was a beautiful script, so they came on board very willingly and very excitedly. Working with them was a wonderful experience; they were as good as actors get in my world and, for me as a director, it was an absolute dream.

What's next for you? Are you eager to start another disaster-themed project?

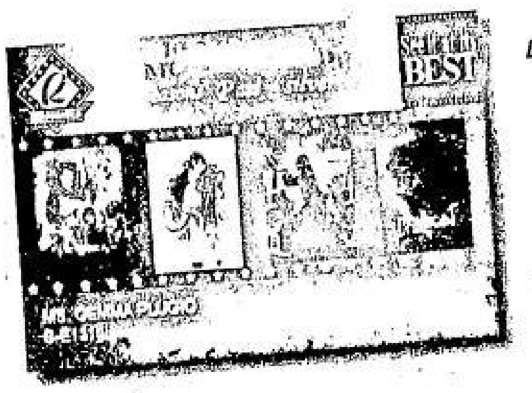
To be honest, I'd probably stay away from it, not because it wasn't a life-changing experience. It was, I don't think I'll ever really get to work on a project which is so moving, so intimate and so intricate and huge ever again. It takes a lot out of you emotionally and at present I'm taking a little bit of a break. I've fallen in love with Thailand and I'm going back there for Christmas as I made so many friends with the film crew and the people there. As of this afternoon, I'm flying towards you guys [in Asia].

("Tsunami, The Aftermath" premieres tonight at 9 and will be shown again on Dec. 30 at 12 p.m.)

Watch and Win an ALL-YEAR-ROUND Robinsons Movieworld Cinema Card!!!

Robinsons Movieworld will give away one (1) cinema card to the 100 cash prize winners of the "Cash sa Pelikula" raffle promo provided that they have watched at least 3 movies at any Robinsons Movieworld Branch.

PROMO PERIOD:
December 25, 2006 to January 05, 2007



NCAP MBC MMDA

See Posters for more details

Per DTI-NCR Permit #5517, Series of 2006

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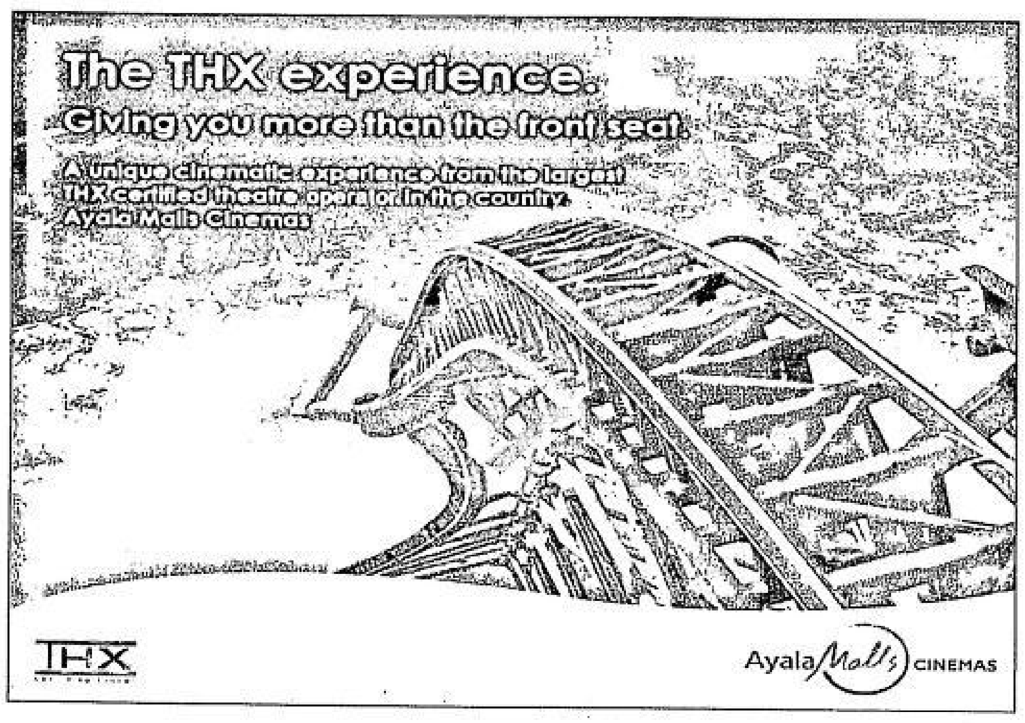

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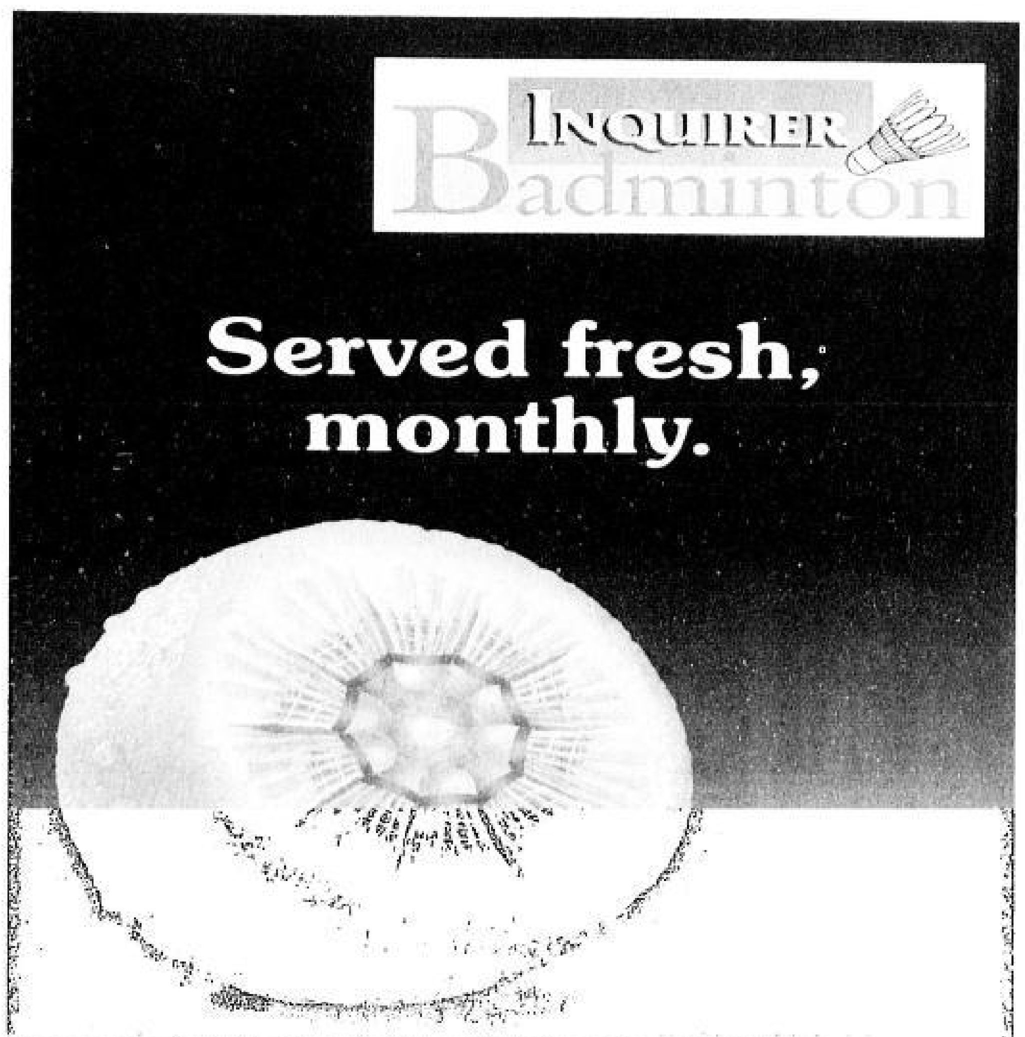

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NOW SHOWING

CINEMA	TITLE	RATING
1	LIGALIG	R-13
2	ZHA-ZHA ZATURNAH	GP

DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND-EX

PROMENADE
GREENHILLS
...a dinetertainment for all!

NOW SHOWING

CINEMA	TITLE	RATING
3	3 BARAHA	PG-13
4	MANO PO	GP
5	SUPER NOYPI	GP

TICKET PRICES & SCREENING TIME SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE. FOR CINEMA INQUIRIES, CALL: 722 4496.

MUSIC MUSEUM

DEC. 27, 2006	"Kyla" Give Love On Christmas Day	8:00 PM
DEC. 28, 2006	Truefaith, Mojofly, Guji Florenza	8:30 PM

TEATRINO
PROMENADE GREENHILLS

EVERY MONDAY	DANCE NIGHT	7:00PM
DEC. 23, 2006	Mishka Adams	9:00 PM
Jan. 16, 23, 30, 2007	Dyords Ko Po FOR INQUIRIES PLS CALL 722-4532 LOC 116	8:30 PM

FOR INQUIRIES & RESERVATION, PLS. CALL: 721-6726 OR 721-0635

LORNA TOLENTINO
GINA ALAJAR
TIRSO CRUZ III
BOOTS ANSON-ROA
CHRISTIAN BAUTISTA
RICHARD GUTIERREZ
ANGEL LOCSIN
我爱你
MANO PO 5
GUA AI DI I LOVE YOU
MS. JACLYN KETCHUP MICHELLE EJUEL AJ IRMA TONY JIM LORENZO JOYCE ELLA SAM

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MOVIE GUIDE
NOW SHOWING

Cineplex
1 LIGALIG
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNAH
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 SUPER NOYPI

PREMIERE
CLOSED

Cinema 2000 Waltermart Makati
Waltermart Center, Chino Roces Ave. cor. Antonio Arnaiz Pio del Pilar, Makati City
Tel 816.4214 / 816.4216
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL - 8

Starmall
(Mandaluyong) tel. 7266160
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 MANO PO - 3
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA

metropolis star
www.clickthecity.com.ph
(ALABANG) tel. 6094286, 6433934
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
4 TATLONG BARAHA

THEATRES
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 MANO PO - 3

PACIFIC MALL LUCENA CINEMAGIC
Pacific Mall Lucena Tel (042) 660-5271
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
3 RESRVED
4 RESRVED

Filinvest Festival Cinemas
(Muntinlupa) tel 850.3571 or 72
1 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL - 8
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 MANO PO - 3
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
6 TATLONG BARAHA
7 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
8 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
9 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
10 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3

Blue Wave Marikina
Sumulong Highway cor. Mayor Gil Fernando Street, Sto. Niño, Marikina City tel. 9341927
1 MANO PO - 5
2 TALTLONG BARAHA
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

SUPER CINERAMA
Isetann Cinerama Complex Recto tel 7334228
1 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

The Marketplace
Mandaluyong
tel 533.3851 / 533.3856
1 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 MANO PO - 5
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

Maragana Cinema
(Pasay) tel 833.3290 / 833.3274
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL

Center Mall Cinema
Baguio Center Mall, Magsaysay Avenue (Baguio City) tel (074)- (4449346)
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA

Jade Cinema
(Angeles City) tel (045) 887.5001 to 03
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 SUPER NOYPI
3 MANO PO - 5
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA

Centre Plaza Cinema
(Balanga, Bataan) tel (047) 237.7007
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA

Eastwood Cinemas
(Eastwood City Walk 2, Eastwood City E. Rodriguez Jr. Ave (C-5) Quezon City) tel 687.6963 or 72
1 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
2 SUPER NOYPI
3 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
4 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL

CINEMA 2000
Movie Theatres of the New Millenium

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Calamba) tel (049) 545.7383
1 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
4

Cinema 2000 Pavilion Mall
(Biñan) tel. (049) 4111146
1 MANO PO - 3
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
4 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL

Cinema 2000 Cinemagix
(Urdaneta) tel(075) 568.6771
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL

Cinema 2000 Metrotown
(Tarlac) tel (045) 982.1729
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL
3 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
4 MANO PO - 3

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Plaridel) tel (044) 795.3320
1 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Gapan) tel. (044) 4867736
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3

Lianas Cinema
(Pasig) tel 640.4748
1 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
2 SUPER NOYPI

Lianas Cinema
(Alabang) tel 850.3276
1 TATLONG BARAHA
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
3 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

Lianas MovieCity
(Calamba) tel (049) 545.7202
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 SHAKE RATTLE 7 ROLL
4 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
5 MANO PO - 5

Fiesta World Mall
(Lipa) tel (043) 981.0790
1 MANO PO - 5
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 SHAKE RATTLE 7 ROLL

Berma Cinema
(Baclaran) tel 879.2030 / 879.2029
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)

MOVIES / SCHEDULES / PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

Stars talk about the blessings of 2006

DOLLY WOOD

Dolly Anne Carvajal

IT'S THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS. DO YOU know where your pesos went? After you've opened all your presents, it's time to unwrap your heart and ponder upon the gifts/lessons of 2006. Even if the holidays leave you broke, what matters is you got more blessings than money to count. Here are some stars' '06 sentiments...

DENNIS TRILLO: "I can't pinpoint the biggest blessing I got. It was almost perfect—the best year in my career. The most important lesson '06 taught me is that the mind is everything. All that we are is a result of what we have. What we think, we become."

RUFFA MAE QUINTO: "Having Erik as my BF is the best thing 2006 brought me. One lesson I learned this year is not to expect money *kahit may* contract *ka na. Kung di uukol, di bubukol.*"

CESAR MONTANO: "Doing the TV ad with my daughter Angelina is the most wonderful experience I had in '06. I can't explain the joy I felt. I realized this year that there's no such thing as wasted time spent with your children."

LORNA TOLENTINO: "The highlight of '06 for me is my numerous product endorsements. I learned to take one day at a time."

OGIE ALCASID: "The most unforgettable moment in '06 was when my daughter Leila received her First Holy Communion. I learned that I can't please everybody, so why bother? I'll just take care of my friends and loved ones."

PAULEEN LUNA: "My debut is the most memorable part of '06. I realized that I can't trust everybody so I have to choose who to confide in from now on."

ALFRED VARGAS: "The coffee-table book of my sexy pictorials is one thing I'll cherish about 2006. I've learned to work harder but also to take things easy. Work hard, party harder!"

IZA CALZADO: "I'll never forget my first trip to Paris this year. I realized that we all make mistakes but with God's grace, our mistakes become lessons."

JOHN PRATS: "My experience inside the PBB house is something I'll treasure. I learned how to give importance to the people who truly love me."

SAY ALONZO: "Joining PBB changed my life and world this year. I learned that not all people who say they love you really mean it. I've also learned not to dwell on the pain but focus on the purpose behind the pain."

LUCKY MANZANO: "I consider my *teleserye* as one of the great things 2006 gave me. I learned to maximize all the blessings that came my way and never to forget to give thanks to Him."

CASS PONTI: "All the opportunities ABS-CBN and Star Magic gave me are the best things. Joining PBB was really a turning point for me. I've learned to value my work and everybody I work with."

World Pyro Olympics

La Mancha Pyro Productions presents the 2nd World Pyro Olympics at the Esplanade (behind SM Mall of Asia) on Dec. 29 and 30 and Jan 5, 6 and 7 at 7 p.m., featuring the best pyrotechnic companies from Denmark, Poland, Canada, Spain and USA, among others. Call 8173073 or log on to www.WorldPyroOlympics.com.

New venue for new year

Welcome the new year in Manila's latest backdrop to life's grand celebrations—The Grand Terrace (Villanueva Drive cor Commonwealth Ave QC). Call 9327407-08 or visit www.grandterraceavenue.com

E-mail wateringholeshangrila@yahoo.com.

SHANG CINEPLEX

① LIGALIG
MTRCB R-13
1.00, 3.15, 5.30, 7:45, 10:00

② ZSA ZSA ZATURNAH
MTRCB GP
11.55, 2:10, 4.25, 6.40, 9.00

③ TATLONG BARAHA
MTRCB PG-13
1.00, 3.15, 5:30, 7:45, 10.00

④ SUPER NOYPI
MTRCB GP
1:15, 3:45, 6.15, 9.00

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Shangri-La Plaza

POWER PLANT CINEMA
Rockwell Center, Makati City ☎ Tel. No: 8981440-41 DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND•EX

SHAKE RATTLLE & ROLL 8 PG13 11:00,1:45,4:30,7:15,10:00	ENTENG KABISOTE 3 G 11:00,1:10,3:30, 5:50,8:10,10:30	SUPER NOYPI G 12:40,3:05,5:30, 7:55,10:20
MANO PO 5	MATAKOT KA SA KARMA PG13 11:20,1:30,3:40, 5:50,8:00,10:10	TATLO BARAHA PG13

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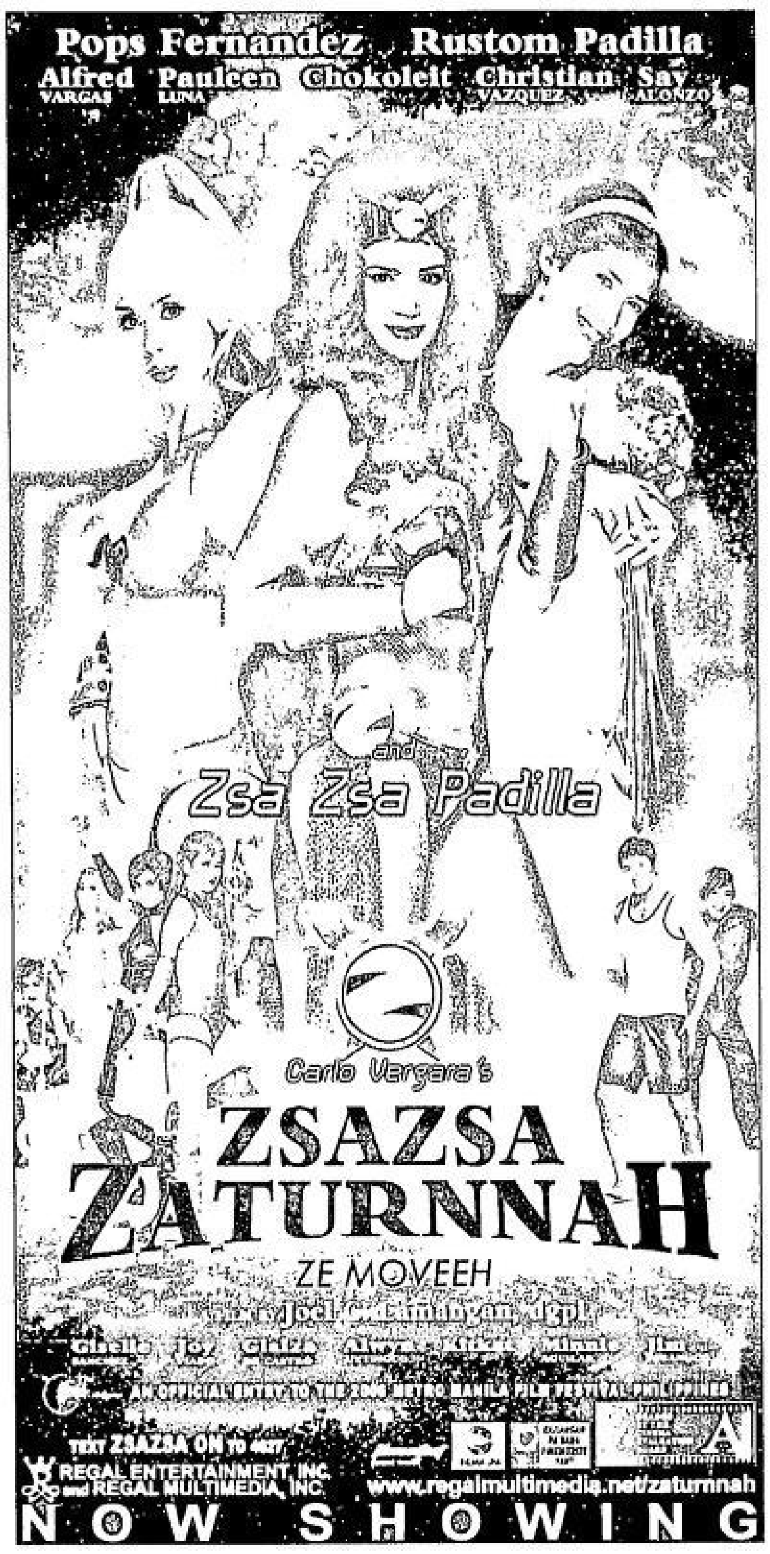
Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 5513 Series of 2006


Pops Fernandez
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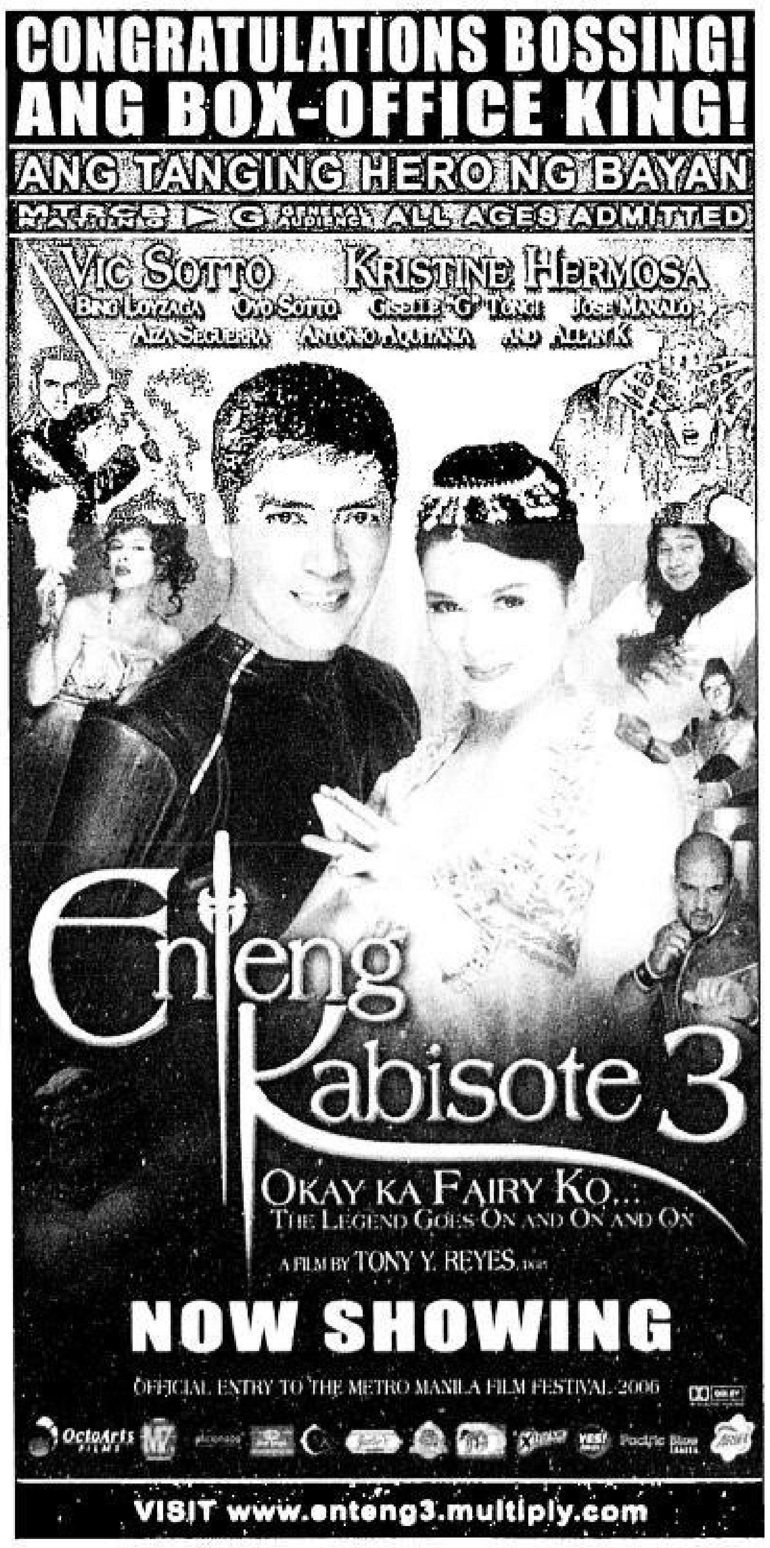
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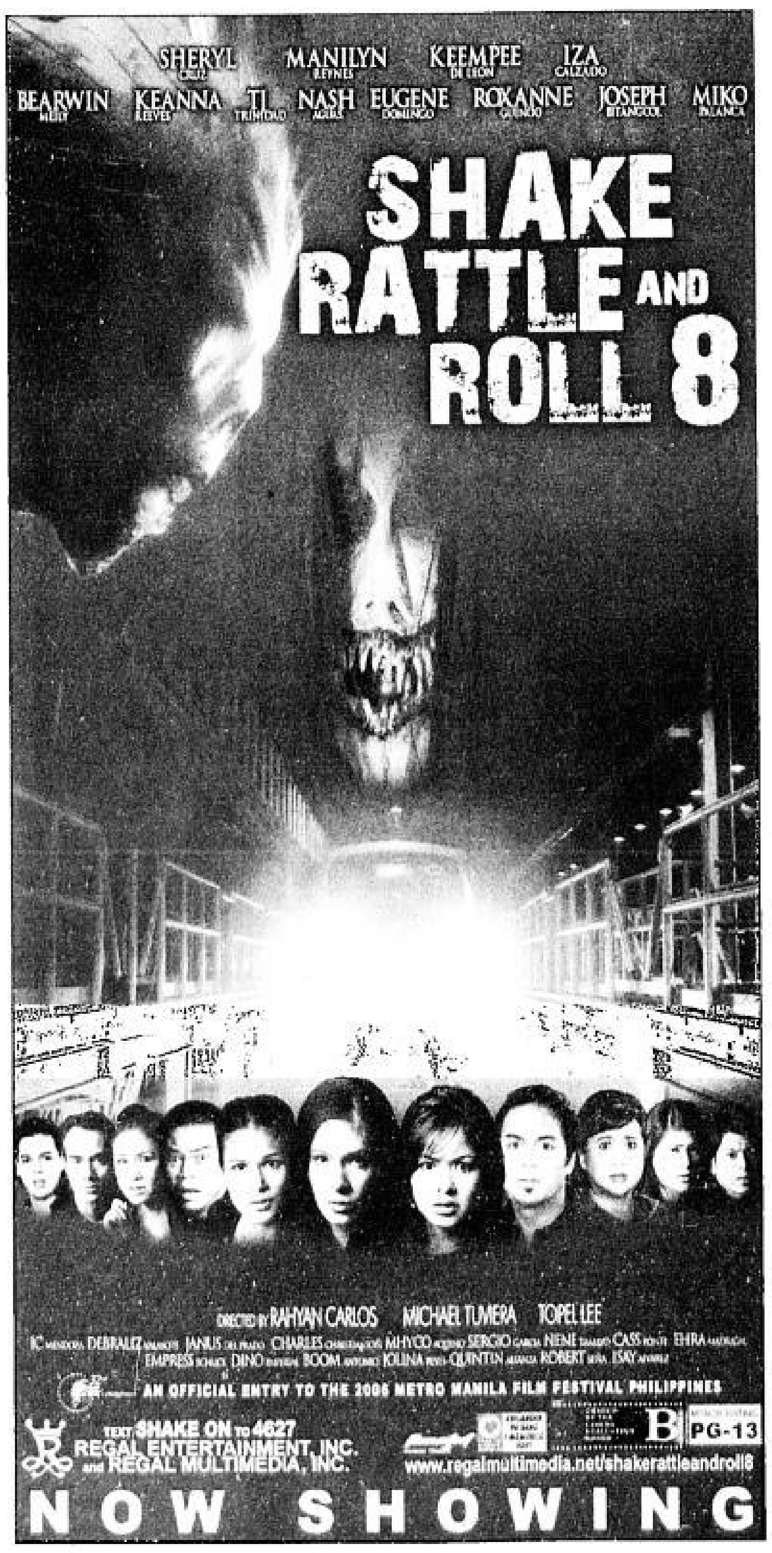
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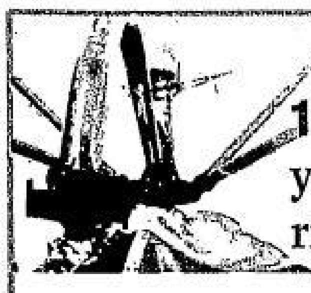

METRO / A19

10-year-old girl killed, 6 other youngsters hurt in carnival ride accident in Marikina City

BUSINESS / B1

Zest-O in talks to buy Dubai-based firm

NEWS / A4

Palace on Smith custody battle: Nothing to do but wait

WORLD / A22

Mao: A monster or an authentic Chinese hero?

Powerful Taiwan quake stirs tsunami alert in RP

By the INQUIRER staff

A POWERFUL EARTHQUAKE STRUCK OFF southwestern Taiwan on Tuesday, triggering a potentially destructive tsunami that Japanese scientists said was headed toward the Philippines but Filipino officials said last night no tsunami had hit the country.

The tsunami alert occurred on the second an-

POWERFUL / A8

PHILIPPINE DAILY
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Wednesday, Dec ★★★ 6 sections / Vol. 22 / No. 19 P18 website: inquirer.net

UN okays RP proposal vs global poverty–JDV

THE PHILIPPINE PROPOSAL FOR A GLOBAL debt-for-equity plan to finance the anti-poverty programs of the United Nations won the unanimous approval of the General Assembly on Dec. 22, Speaker Jose de Venecia announced yesterday.

In a statement sent from the UN headquarters in New York, De Venecia said the plan, if adopted by creditor countries, would convert half of the

UN OKAYS RP/ A9

CHRISTMAS DAY FIRE. Firemen and police investigators sift through the ashes of a one-story department store in Ormoc City one day after a killer fire raced through the establishment.

AP

Christmas inferno kills 24

Boy with firecracker ignites blaze at Ormoc dep't store

By Joey A. Gabieta
Inquirer Visayas

ORMOC CITY—A FIRECRACKER LIT BY A CHILD ignited a pile of fireworks on display at a department store in Ormoc City in Leyte, turning Christmas Day into an inferno.

At least 24 people—shoppers, vendors and store employees—were killed and 22 others were injured in the fire that burned down the Unitop store.

Police said people near the entrance managed to escape but others fled deeper and ran into a bathroom, where 23 bodies were later found. Many of them were believed to have suffocated.

A dramatic footage on ANC television showed an unidentified woman looking trapped on the roof of the burning building. Then, braving the heat and the smoke, she clambered onto the roof of a nearby building to save herself.

Survivors and bystanders said they could hear people screaming "Fire, fire" as flames swallowed up the one-story building.

Two of those killed were infants only a few months old.

Police said the exit door at the back of the store was padlocked, blocking the escape route, according to The Associated Press.

Firemen later broke the lock, enabling some of the trapped people to get out.

Survivors said the store was filled with shoppers when the fire broke out at around 4:40 p.m.

Thinking the explosions from

CHRISTMAS/ A6

Get killers of activists, CPP orders NPA rebels

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF the Philippines yesterday renewed its order to its armed wing, the New People's Army, to go after military and police forces it believed were behind the killings of activists.

On its 38th founding anniversary, the CPP said in a statement posted on its website that the NPA should attain revolutionary justice for all the victims of "state terrorism."

The statement did not identify targets by name, but described the Cabinet oversight committee in charge of internal security as the "director" of the attacks against activists.

The CPP said the Cabinet committee's special operations teams and death squads were behind the spate of extrajudicial killings.

"(The NPA should) form teams with the determination and skills and choose the time and place for arresting the criminals and bringing them to justice or for giving battle to those who are well-armed and cannot be peaceably arrested," the CPP said.

It said "the best time to arrest or give battle to the monsters in the Arroyo regime is when they are already in a state of rapid political decline."

HUNT DOWN/ A17

Survivors remember killer tsunami

A MAN on motorcycle rides past a fishing boat still stranded on top of houses in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, on Tuesday, two years after a tsunami pulverized villages facing the Indian Ocean and killed 230,000 people.

REUTERS

BALI, INDONESIA—THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE FLED beaches in Indonesia's largest-ever tsunami drill yesterday as nations across Asia remembered the moment two years ago when devastating waves crashed into coastlines and killed 230,000 people.

Elsewhere, survivors and mourners visited mass graves, lit candles along beaches, observed a moment of silence and erected warning towers in hopes of saving lives in the future.

But as Thai authorities prepared to open a cemetery for unidentified tsunami victims, foreign donors alleged that nearly a million dollars intended for DNA sampling and other testing appeared to have been misused.

The magnitude 9.0 earthquake that ripped apart the ocean floor off Indonesia's Sumatra island on Dec. 26, 2004, spawned giant waves that fanned out across the Indian Ocean at jetliner speeds, killing people in a dozen countries and leaving millions homeless.

Entire villages were swept to sea in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, luxury resorts and fishing communities submerged in Thailand and thousands of homes destroyed in southern India—where commemorations were small and subdued.

SURVIVORS/ A8

Murdered Abra lawmaker buried today

DOJ places governor on hold departure order list

By Leoncio Balbin Jr. and Frank Cimatu
Inquirer Northern Luzon

BANGUED, ABRA—THE PHILIPPINE National Police has deployed its Special Action Force to secure this Abra capital today for the burial of Rep. Luis Bersamin Jr., PNP Director General Oscar Calderon announced yesterday.

Calderon reviewed the peace and order situation in the violence-wracked province and arrangements for the burial of Bersamin, 62, who was gunned down on Dec. 16 outside Mt. Carmel Church in Quezon City, along with his police bodyguard, Adelfo Ortega, 49.

The 100-strong special PNP force will be reinforced by the Cordillera police mobile group, Calderon said. Checkpoints will also be set up in the capital.

"We want the PNP to be very visible," he said.

Calderon met with members of Bersamin's family yesterday and gave his assurance that the PNP would give them security escorts even after the May elections next year.

Thousands of Abra residents are expected to attend Bersamin's burial at 7 a.m. today, said the lawmaker's eldest daughter Charrie Bersamin. "We are satisfied with General Calderon's assurance of safety for us and the people," she said.

In Manila, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez announced that a hold departure order had been issued against Abra Gov. Vicente Valera, 61, who was implicated in Bersamin's murder by former Army M/Sgt. Rufino Panday.

Panday, 63, an Abra native, was arrested on Dec. 19 in his Makati City residence. He confessed he had acted as lookout during the assassination, which he said was carried out by four other men.

They included former La Paz, Abra, Vice Mayor Freddie Dupo, who Panday said had told him that Valera was the brains behind

MURDERED/ A6

Aging pets work out in gyms, unwind with hot spa, massage

TOKYO—HE MAY BE AN OLD dog, but he's family.

Andy has sprouted white whiskers, suffers from lower back pain and no longer bounds up the stairs like he used to.

Still, the 11-year-old Siberian husky isn't lying idle. Every week, he meets his personal trainer for a run on an underwater treadmill, does laps in a doggy pool to strengthen his

SANA AKO DIN, PERO BATA PA AKO

AGING PETS/ A9

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Southern Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao will have cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers. The rest of the country will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy with isolated rainshowers and thunderstorms.

SOURCE: PAGASA

Metro Manila	Cloudy with Rains	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Cloudy with Rains	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Cloudy with Rains	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Cloudy with Rains	Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Cloudy with Rains	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Rainy	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Cloudy with Rains	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

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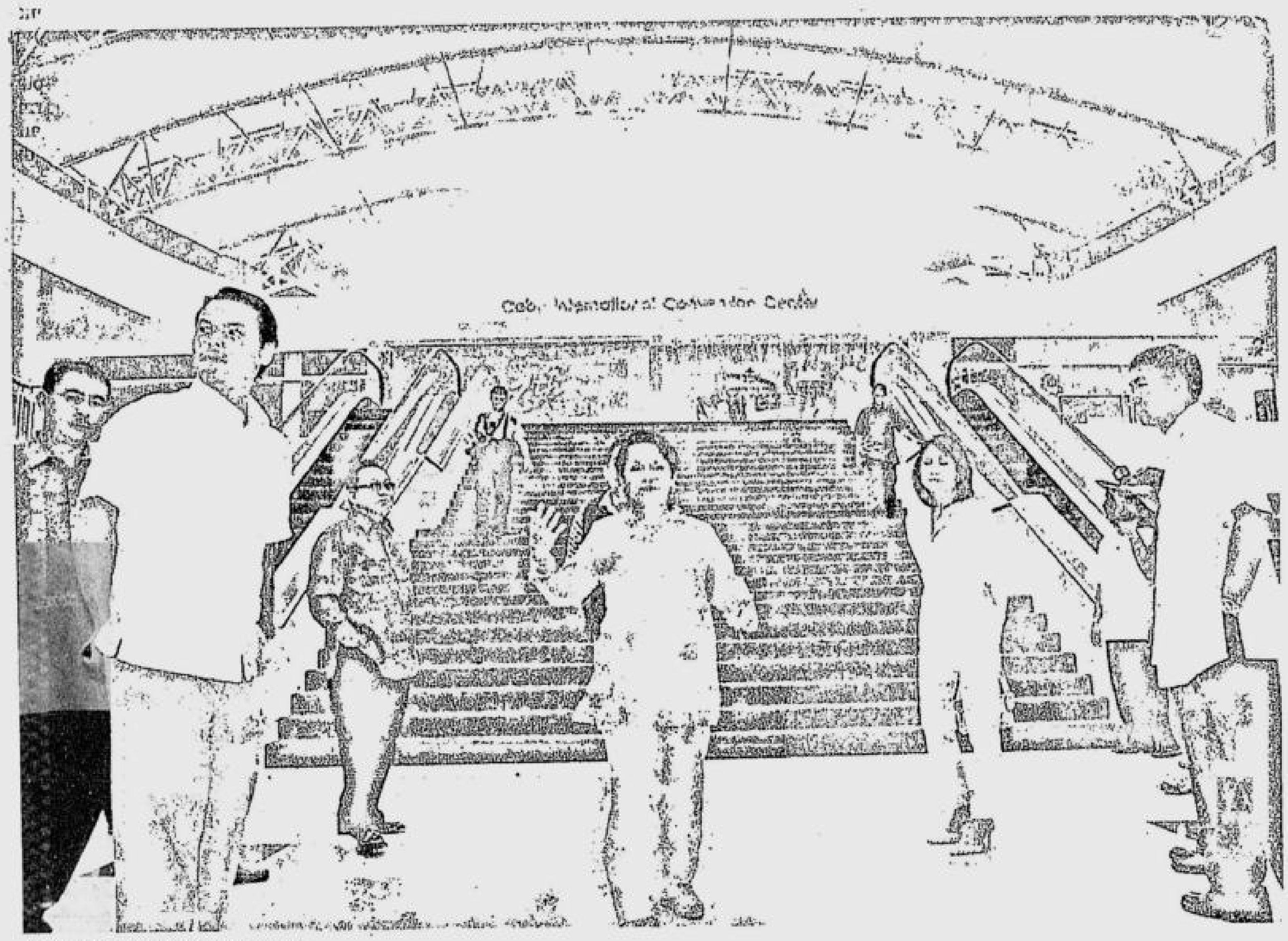
Gov't will take less for PLDT stake



ANOTHER INSPECTION
President Macapagal-Arroyo inspects the Cebu International Convention Center upon her arrival from Manila. The venue is the site of the once-postponed summits of the Association of Southeast Asian leaders and their East Asian counterparts. Ms Arroyo is accompanied by Tourism Secretary Ace Durano (left), Cebu City Rep. Antonio Cuenco (in dark glasses) and Cebu Gov. Gwen Garcia. CDN PHOTO/JUNJIE MENDOZA

By Daxim L. Lucas

THE GOVERNMENT WAS WILLING TO ACCEPT even less than the P25.2 billion it is set to receive for its stake in the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. because the block is not attractive enough to potential buyers.

"We were ready to accept the fact that the price would really be low," explained commissioner Ricardo Abcede of the Presidential Commission on Good Government amid accusations by Rep. Arnulfo Fuentebella that the PCGG had sold its sequestered shares in the Philippine Telecommunications Investment Corp. (PTIC) at a "scandalous and irregular" price.

The shares of stock of PTIC, which owns a stake in telecom giant PLDT, are registered under the name of Prime Holdings Inc., an alleged dummy firm of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

In January, the Supreme Court ruled that 111,415 sequestered PTIC shares were part of the Marcos ill-gotten wealth and ordered them forfeited in favor of the government.

Last week, the Sandiganbayan antigraft court awarded the shares to the government and ordered the PTIC to cancel the shares registered in the name of PHI and issue new certificates in the name of the Republic of the Philippines.

'Small minority'

Abcede pointed out that the attractiveness of the government's stake in PTIC was hobbled by the fact that it represents only a "small minority" in PLDT.

The 115,415 shares represent ownership of close to seven percent in the telecoms firm which used to be a telecommunications monopoly during Marcos' rule.

"Anywhere you go, a minority [stake] will always be worth less," said Abcede.

He said the PCGG's pursuit of an attractive price was hindered even more by the shares representing only an indirect stake in PLDT.

This was further aggravated by the fact that PLDT's majority owner, Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Inc. holds the "right of first refusal" over the contested shares. This allows First Pacific to buy the shares by merely matching the bid made by any third-party investor interested in buying into telecommunications giant.

Wrong computation

First Pacific is close to clinching the deal for the PTIC shares, having vowed to match the highest bid of P25.2 billion from Singapore-based Parallax Venture Fund XXVII.

Fuentebella claimed that no public bidding took place on the sale of the shares, and that "certain parties" may have manipulated the process to enable First Pacific and its Japanese partner NTT DoCoMo to purchase the shares at a discount.

Because of this, the government stands to lose anywhere between P8 billion and P17 billion on the deal, Fuentebella said.

But the congressman's computations were apparently based on the price of PLDT, not PTIC, shares at the Philippine Stock Exchange of almost P2,500 per share.

Abcede denied any wrongdoing on the government's part or collusion with any other party to favor the bid of First Pacific.

"Everything about this bidding is transparent," he said, explaining that First Pacific merely matched the P25.2-billion bid of Parallax, as the rules allowed them to do.

"This is not a fire sale or a sweetheart deal," he said.

He said First Pacific, owned by the Salim family of Indonesia and represented locally by PLDT chair Manuel V. Pangilinan, merely wanted to consolidate its hold on the company.

GMA cites resiliency of Guinsaugon

By Jolene R. Bulambot
and Jani Arnaiz, *Inquirer Visayas*

CEBU CITY—HAVING EXPERIENCED the pain of losing their loved ones, the Guinsaugon survivors could become a source of inspiration for victims of the Bicol landslides, President Macapagal-Arroyo said here yesterday.

Speaking at the inauguration of the Microsoft Philippines office here, Ms Arroyo noted that the people of Guinsaugon, St. Bernard in Southern Leyte have overcome the tragic event that claimed the lives of their loved ones.

"It's an inspiration for those who are suffering now in Bicol because, after nine months from the tragedy, they're already back on their feet," she pointed out.

The President was scheduled Tuesday to visit St. Bernard to witness the turnover of 335 housing units at the New Guinsaugon village in Barangay Magbagakay but the visit was canceled due to heavy rains in the area.

"We thank God because of the early recovery of the people of Southern Leyte, Guinsaugon and Liloan," Ms Arroyo said when asked by Southern Leyte Gov. Rosette Lerias to say a few words through the mobile phone.

She also thanked the donors who helped the victims of the tragedy.

The beneficiaries of the housing units, government officials and employees, lined up along the route of the President despite the heavy downpour.

The beneficiaries are surviving family members of the mudslide on Feb. 16, after a portion of Mt. Kanabag collapsed and disintegrated into a wall of mud, burying alive almost 2,000 people in Guinsaugon.

Only 900 bodies were retrieved while about a thousand others, including some 200 school children attending classes at the local public elementary school, remained missing and presumed dead.

The President was also scheduled to inaugurate, with taipan Lucio Tan, the school buildings, health and day care centers and other facilities donated by the Federation of Filipino Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FFCCI), Derma Drum Association of Taiwan, the Japanese and Australian governments.

The other scheduled activities include the ceremonial turnover of the housing units for the 276 families dislocated by landslides in Panaon Island.

At 10 minutes past 10 a.m., Ms Arroyo's trip cancellation was announced. Lerias called the President on her mobile phone and asked Ms Arroyo to give a message.

In her speech at the inauguration of the Microsoft Cebu office, the President also expressed optimism over the country's prospects in 2007.

"We will surely greet the New Year with another strong start with our economy, as we share optimism and hope for the united Philippines," she said.

Ms Arroyo vowed that the government would ensure that people would be able to reap the gains of the strong economy in 2007.

"Next year will be the time to drive our economic gains deeper in the grassroots as we make more strategic headway against terrorism and insurgency and improve the climate of law and order in the cities and countryside; rehabilitate our calamity stricken communities; and get our people back on the platform of enterprise," said the President.

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GMA asked to sign poll automation bill

By TJ Burgonio

GORDON

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARroyo should sign into law the Congress-approved legislation seeking to automate the election system to show her commitment to credible elections, beginning with the May 2007 polls, according to Sen. Richard Gordon.

"She has to sign it. She will be seen as insincere [if she doesn't]," said Gordon, the chair of the Senate committee on constitutional amendments and the main author of the Senate version of the bill.

"She can't turn her back now. She certified this bill," he said in a phone interview.

Gordon warned that if the bill is not enacted into law, it would fuel suspicions that the administration was planning to cheat in next year's elections.

He said that contrary to claims by election officials, there would be ample time to implement the partial automation of selected provinces and cities in May, with a wide range of technology available from both domestic and foreign markets.

No enthusiasm

The senator was dismayed at the President's seeming lack of enthusiasm to sign the bill, which she had certified as urgent and which Congress ratified way before it went on holiday break last week.

"I'm puzzled why she has not acted on this measure, which is part of her 10-point agenda. When we passed this measure, I didn't hear her say 'I'm glad we're going to have automated elections.' She should have signed it right away. It will boost her credibility," he said.

In the absence of such a law five months before the scheduled elections, Comelec chair Benjamin Abalos Sr. has declared it was no longer possible to automate the elections, a view that was shared by election lawyers for the President and her political rival, the late Fernando Poe Jr.

Abalos said what might be viable was the electronic transmission of election results, but not the voting and the counting.

The House and the Senate ratified the measure last Dec. 7 which authorizes the partial automation of elections in six provinces and six highly urbanized cities in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao in 2007, and full automation in 2010.

The proposed law seeks to amend and expand the scope of the current automation law, Republic Act 8436, by authorizing the use of an AES (automated election system) in the voting, counting, consolidation, canvassing and transmission of results and other electoral processes.

Gordon said there was no sense of urgency on the part of the administration about enacting the measure, "and I can only surmise that some people may still want a cheated election."

He said the estimated 1 to 2 million votes to be cast in the pilot areas of six provinces and six cities in partially automation elections were so large that these could affect the final tally in a closely contested vote.

Fool-proof

"That can't be cheated. And it will be crucial in the senatorial and congressional elections," he said.

He said this could shape the political configuration in the Senate and House of Representatives in the next Congress, which would "affect concerns on impeachment, Charter change and everything else."

As to Abalos' claim about lack of time, the senator said the government could lease the paper-based ballots technology that was used in the recent US elections.

"It can be done. There's still time, we only need to change the names of the candidates in the machines. You can use different machines for every province. This is just partial automation, not the whole country," he said.

Army chief unhurt as plane loses brakes

By Nikko Dizon and Dona Z. Pazzibugan

A LIGHT MILITARY AIRCRAFT carrying the Philippine Army chief and two colonels lost its brakes shortly before taking off at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia).

But Lt. Gen. Romeo Tolentino, Philippine Army commanding general, and his companions, Col. Cesar Yano, G3 (Army operations); Col. Ramon Cabal, G4 (Army logistics); Capt. Louie Demaala, aide de camp; and Chief M/Sgt. Fidel Alegre, the Army sergeant major, were unhurt, according to airport officials.

Tolentino and his party were set to fly to Bicol to visit Army troops engaged in relief and rehabilitation work for typhoon-ravaged areas.

The plane's pilots, Army Maj. Alex Aduca and Capt. Vicente Gazo, had to abort the flight.

According to an Army statement, the Army Cessna plane had a "brake malfunction prior to take off" at Runway 6 of the NAIA at around 7:45 a.m.

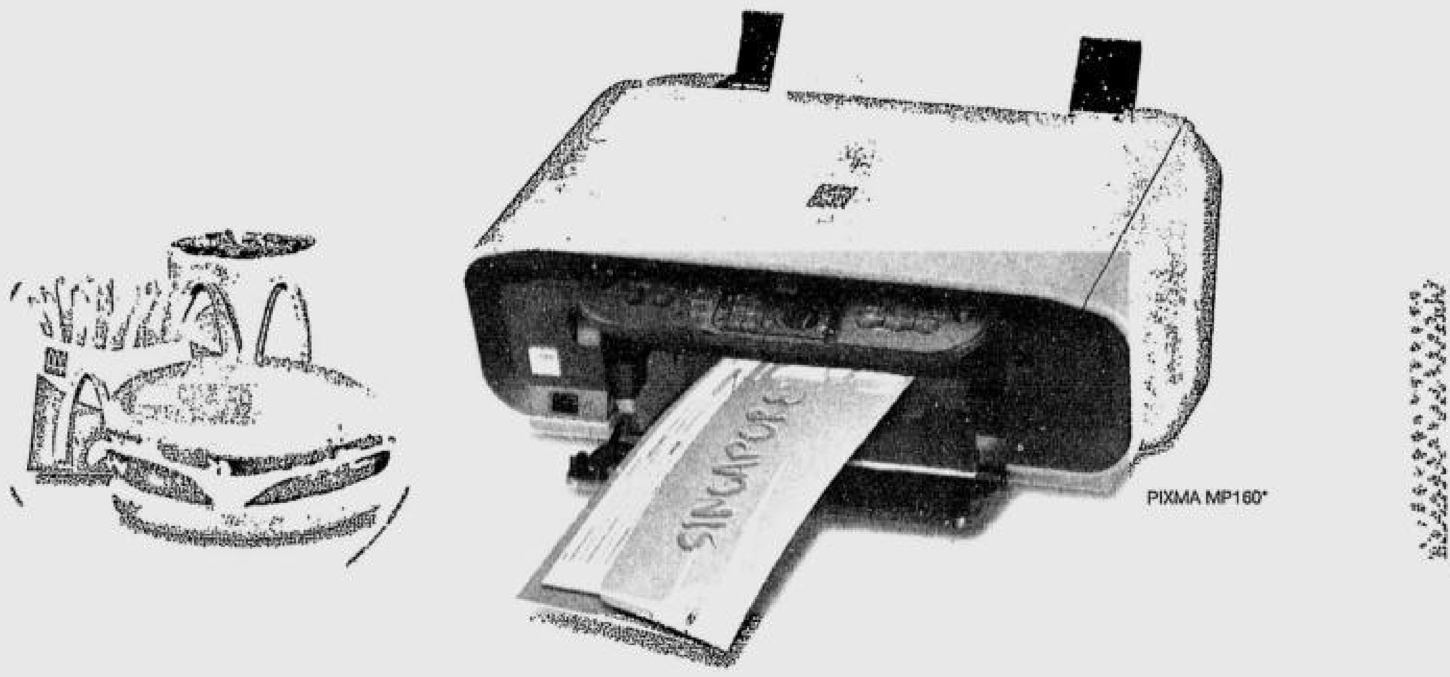
Investigation showed that while taxiing, the six-seater Cessna 421B (RP-C421) owned by the Philippine Army experienced a braking system problem and stopped at the H-2 area.

An incident report from the airport authority said that at 7:50 am, the Manila Control Tower requested for assistance from the safety patrol for the stalled aircraft on the H-2 area of the runway.

The aircraft had to be manually towed. But the incident did not cause any flight delays at the Naia.

Army spokesperson Maj. Ernesto Torres Jr. said Tolentino, the two staff colonels and his aide de camp later proceeded to the Southern Luzon Command (SolCom) headquarters in Lucena City and then to the 9th Infantry Division headquarters in Pili, Camarines Sur on board an Air Force helicopter.

"The group of CGPA (commanding general Philippine Army) is safe and sound at the 9th ID headquarters," said Torres. "The purpose of the trip is to visit the Army troops and to assess the relief and rehabilitation activities of the Army in the area," he added.



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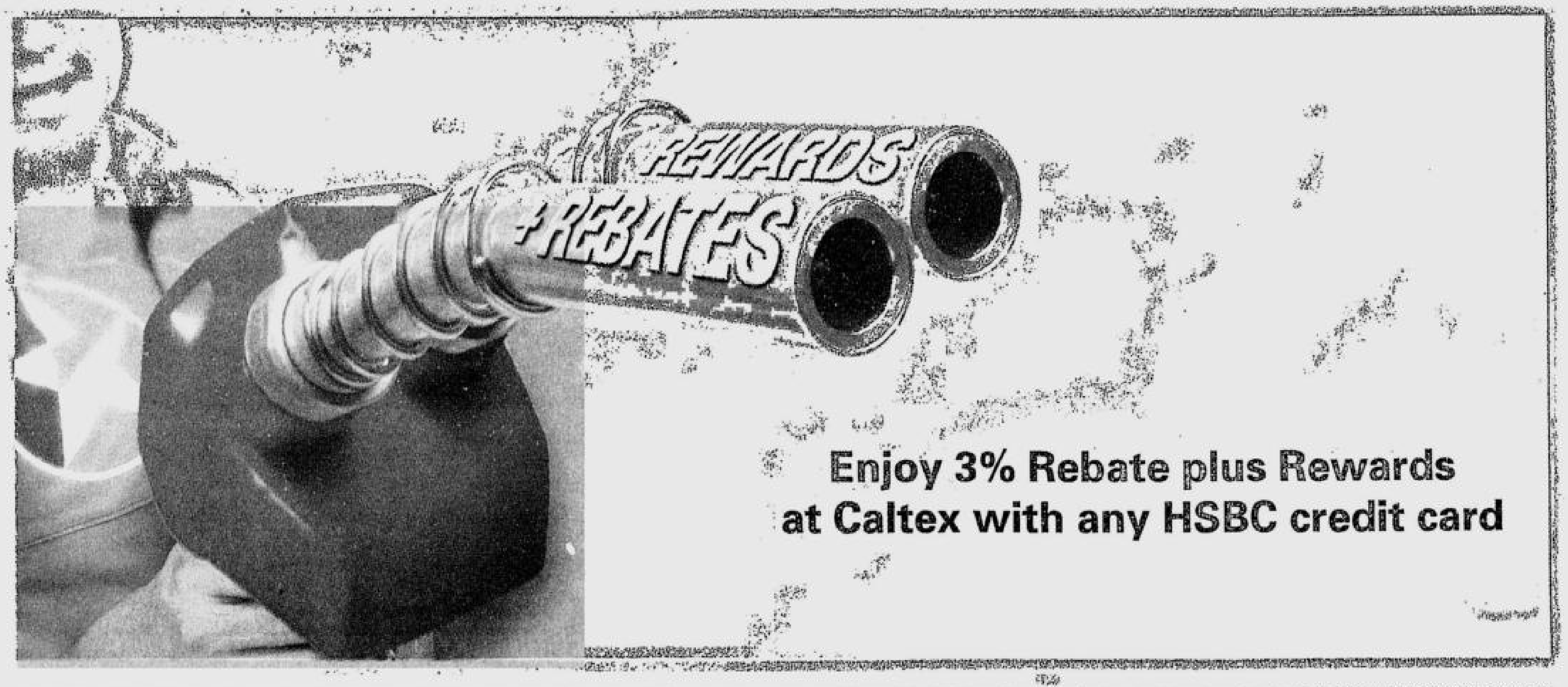

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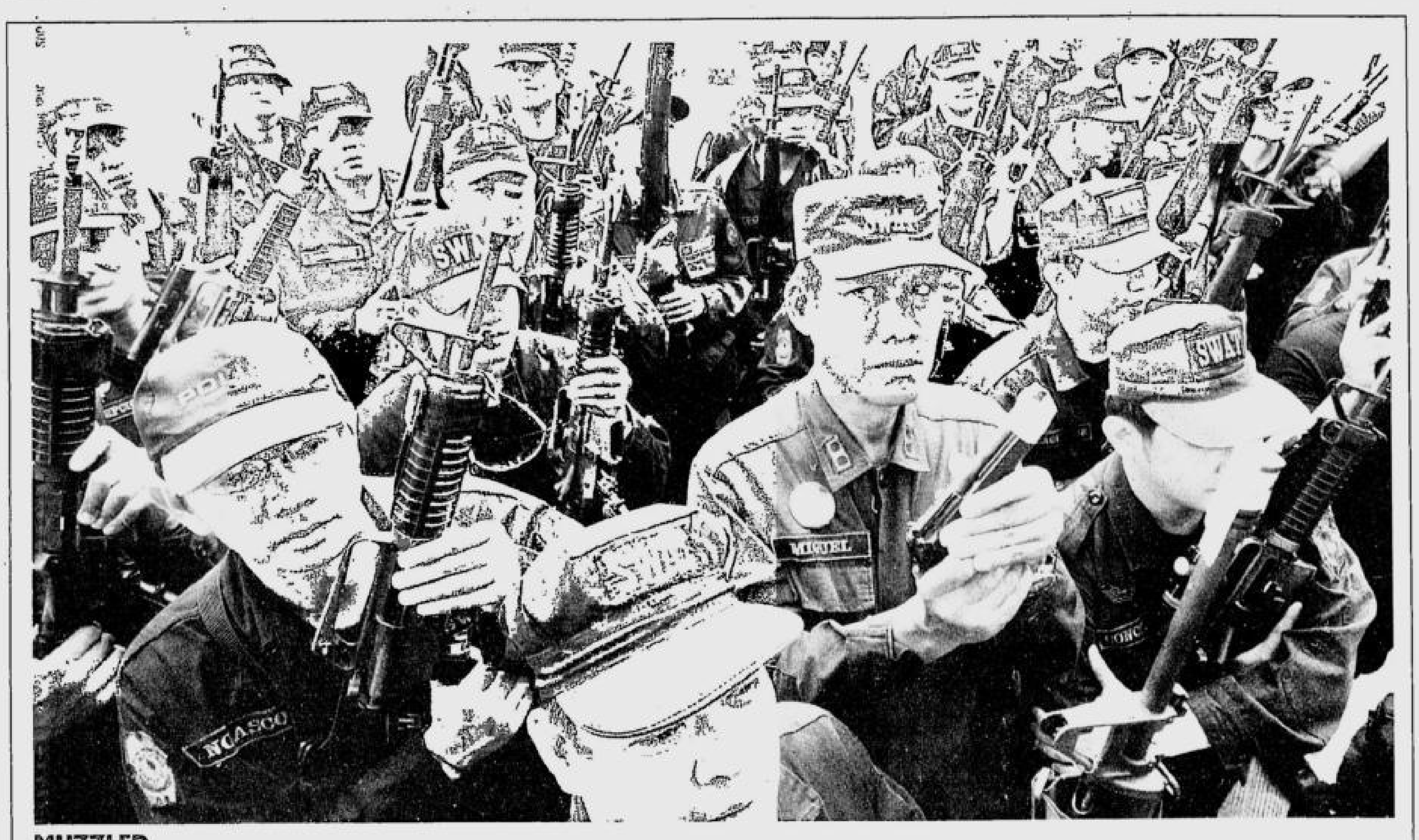


MUZZLED
Officers of the SWAT team of the Manila Police District put tape on the nozzle of their rifles and hand guns to prevent them from indiscriminately firing them during the holiday season.
REM ZAMORA

SMITH CUSTODY BATTLE

Palace: Nothing to do but wait

By Tarra V. Quismundo and Christine O. Avendaño

MALACAÑANG CAN DO nothing but wait for the Court of Appeals to decide the custody dispute involving a United States soldier convicted of raping a Filipina, according to Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita.

But the Executive Branch has taken the necessary steps to keep the Philippines' commitments to the United States under the Visiting Forces Agreement by arguing before the appellate court why it should allow Lance Cpl Daniel Smith, who remains in detention at the Makati City Jail, to be transferred to US custody.

The government filed two petitions with the court last week in support of the move of Smith's lawyers questioning the US soldier's continued detention at the Makati jail.

"All we can do now is wait for developments in the CA," Ermita said in a phone interview.

The appeals court resumes sessions today after the Christmas holiday break.

Message from jail

From his detention cell yesterday, Smith sent a message of thanks to those who gave him support, helping him get through his first jailhouse Christmas.

In a handwritten letter, Smith expressed his gratitude to strangers who sent him gifts and treats on Christmas Day and in previous weeks.

"To all the people who took their time out to send me a card, write me a letter, or drop off a gift over these past couple of weeks. Thank you so much. These things have made the holidays a memorable time. From me and my family, thank you all and God Bless," he said.

Smith wrote the note on the 22nd day of his detention on the advice of his lawyers.

The 21-year-old Marine has gained a fan base in the Philippines, among them Filipino wives of US servicemen and expatriates, since being convicted in early December for the rape of a Filipino woman on Nov. 1, 2005.

"We [lawyers] told him that he should thank his supporters and then we will release it to the media," said lead lawyer Jose Justiniano.

'I'm innocent'

Asked how his client was coping, Justiniano quoted the soldier as saying, "How can I feel at ease here when I'm being detained although I'm innocent?"

Backed by the US and Malacañang, Smith has been seeking that he be returned to US custody, citing provisions in the VFA, a treaty that stipulates legal protection for US troops engaged in joint military exercises here.

"Nicole," the Filipina who filed and won the rape case against Smith, along with her lawyers and supporters, have been strongly opposed to Smith's request.

"My god, they're too much ... They do not see that he is a rapist and all they see in him is that he is a heartthrob," said Nicole of Smith's growing army of supporters.

"But what will you do with someone [who's] handsome when what's on the inside is the opposite?," she said.

Nicole's fans

The 23-year-old rape victim said she had her own supporters in her US servicemen friends have been wishing her well since hearing of the news of her victory.

"Chris Mills [the US soldier who was among those with her at an Olongapo City nightspot on the night of the rape] told me that other servicemen whom he ran into would tell him to tell Nicole that she won her fight. He told me that he is proud of me and that his friends really admire me," Nicole said.

The Office of the Solicitor General, representing the Department of Foreign Affairs, initially filed a motion to intervene at the CA, arguing that under the terms of the VFA, the US should retain custody of Smith while his case was on appeal.

The OSG followed this up with a submission, containing an "agreement" signed between Manila and Washington in which the two governments manifested their desire to have Smith returned to the custody of US authorities.

Late last week, the OSG filed an "urgent manifestation and motion" informing the CA that the US and the Philippines had agreed to designate a room at the US Embassy in Manila where Smith would be detained while his rape case was on appeal.

Inspection rights

The second agreement also stated that the Philippine National Police and the Secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government would be granted "inspection rights" while Smith was detained at the US Embassy.

Despite these efforts by the Executive, US officials announced last week that it was canceling next year's annual war games with the Philippines because of the Smith custody issue.

"But you know the US understands the separation of powers of the Executive and the judiciary," Ermita said in Filipino.

Relatives search for missing NDF consultant

LOS BAÑOS, LAGUNA—CESAR BATRALO, a consultant for the leftist National Democratic Front, did not make it to his family's Christmas reunion in San Pablo City, just south of Manila. The human rights group Karapatan believe he could be the 94th victim of "forced disappearance" this year and the 207th since 2001.

Doris Cuario, secretary general of Karapatan in the Southern Tagalog area, said Batralo is also the fifth NDF consultant to be reported missing this year, added Cuario.

His relatives believe he was illegally taken by military or police forces, if not the latest victim in the spate of political killings in the Philippines.

"If my brother is in (police or military) custody, they must tell us. If he has done something against the law, like any other person, he deserves a legal process," said Cora Ramil, an elder sister of Batralo.

But the police and the military in Southern Luzon have denied they have Batralo, according to Ramil and Karapatan.

Ramil said their last correspondence was through text messages between 2:30 pm to 4 p.m. on December 21 when Batralo said he was in San Mateo, Rizal on his way to Manila. Ramil's daughter Kate was supposed to fetch him in Manila and bring him to the family reunion.

"After that text, he did not show up and we started to worry," she said in Filipino. "We tried to call him many times but his phone was always unattended." Friends and colleagues they contacted all did not know his whereabouts.

"We spent the Christmas looking for him in various police stations and military camps but we were told they have no information about my brother," she said. They have also searched for him in hospitals and morgues.

"Hindi kami makakain o makatulog, (We can neither eat nor sleep)," she said. "We have been thinking of him. We feel clueless and lost. Our family is really in a state of confusion."

She said they were afraid that Batralo was either experiencing torture in the hands of his captors or that he was buried alive.

His family sought the help of Karapatan. *Niña Catherine Calleja, Inquirer Southern Luzon*

Help stop int'l funding of local Reds, US urged

By Norman Bordadora

AN ANTI-COMMUNIST PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION yesterday expressed hope that the US will help the Philippine government deal with overseas-based groups that have alleged financial ties with the local armed insurgency.

Luis Balbago, spokesperson of the Inang Bayan Movement, said US assistance against groups in foreign shores who help the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army will further squeeze theCPP-NPA's funding dry.

"This proposed Philippine plan for stronger cooperation with the US in dealing with CPP-NPA fronts could prove to be the key in finally breaking the back of the 37-year old communist insurgency in the country," Balbago said.

"With terrorism continuing to be a looming threat on global security, Washington should not hesitate to back this Manila proposal, especially after it had identified the CPP-NPA as one of 34 foreign terrorist organizations or FTOs in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on US soil," he added.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government recently proposed before the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security that Washington keep a close watch on groups supporting the CPP-NPA's alleged legal fronts.

Lucia Iñigo; 88

LUCIA STA. ROSA-IÑIGO, mother of INQUIRER columnist and former sports editor Manolo Iñigo and grandmother of Balita sports Dennis Iñigo, died yesterday morning after a heart attack. She was 88.

Mrs. Iñigo also left behind daughter Chuchi Hermoso, sons Junior and Pancho and grandchildren.

Her remains lie at the Iñigo residence in Tabing-Ilog, Marilao, Bulacan. She will be buried tomorrow at the Marilao Memorial Park after Mass at the San Gabriel Parish Church.

Corrections

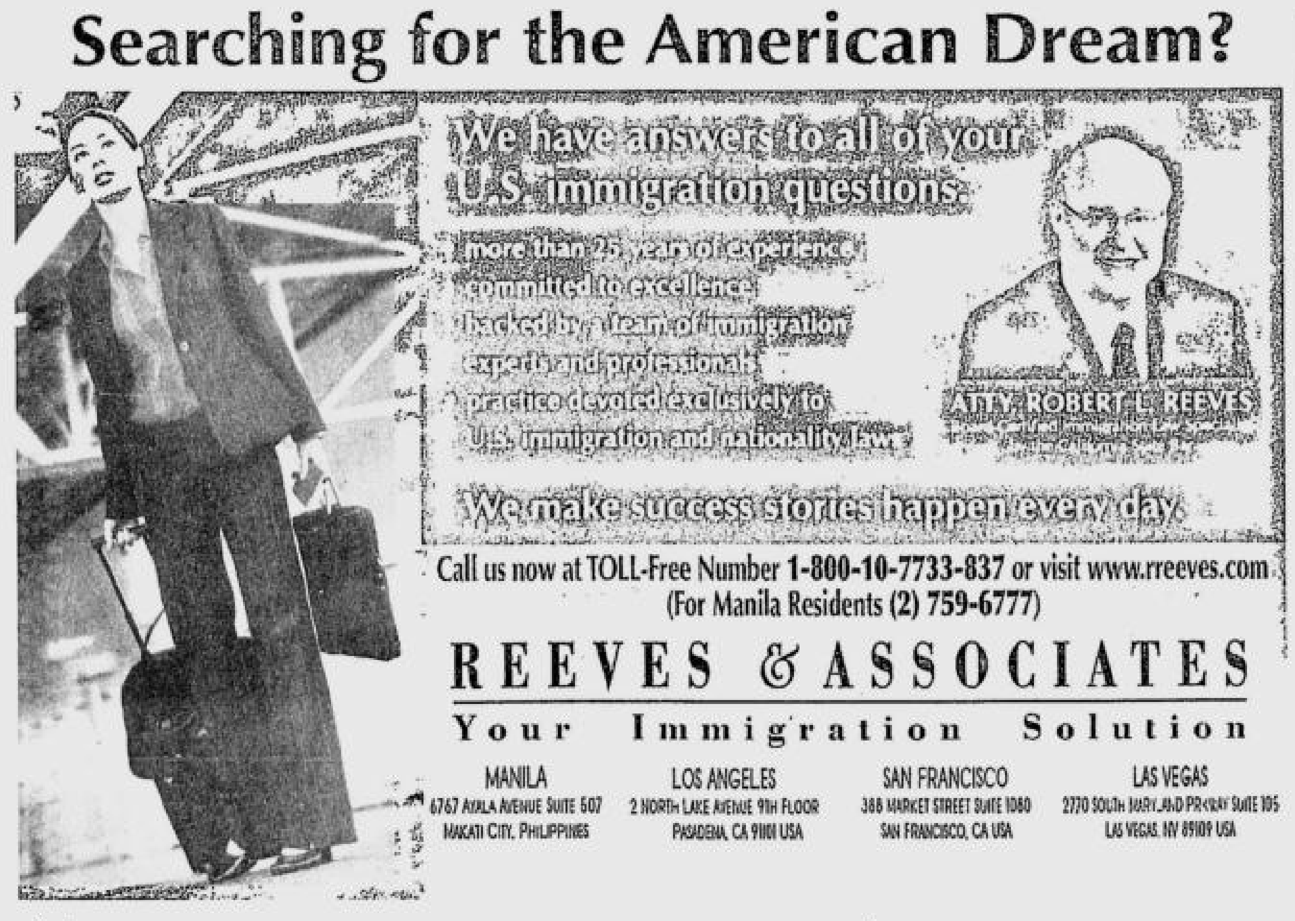
IN THE DEC. 23 ISSUE, a front-page story—"Abra governor linked to solon's murder"—misstated the time Rep. Luis "Chito" Bersamin and his bodyguard were killed. The two were gunned down at Mt. Carmel Church in New Manila, Quezon City, on Dec. 16 at 5:25 p.m.—not shortly before 3 p.m.

* * *

IN THE SAME ISSUE, a front-page article—"New houses, hope for typhoon survivors"—misspelled the last name of the entertainer who sang during the Gawad Kalinga award ceremonies in Legazpi City. The correct spelling of the entertainer's name is Bimbo Cerrudo—not Cerudo.

* * *

IN THE DEC. 25 ISSUE, a caption of a photo on Page B-2 accompanying a Business Monday article—"All I want for Christmas . . ."—misspelled the surname of the president of French Baker Inc. The correct spelling of the company president's name is Johnlu Koa—not Cua. The name of the car company that Koa said fulfilled his Christmas wish was also misspelled in the article. The correct spelling of the car company's name is Toyota—not Toyoto.



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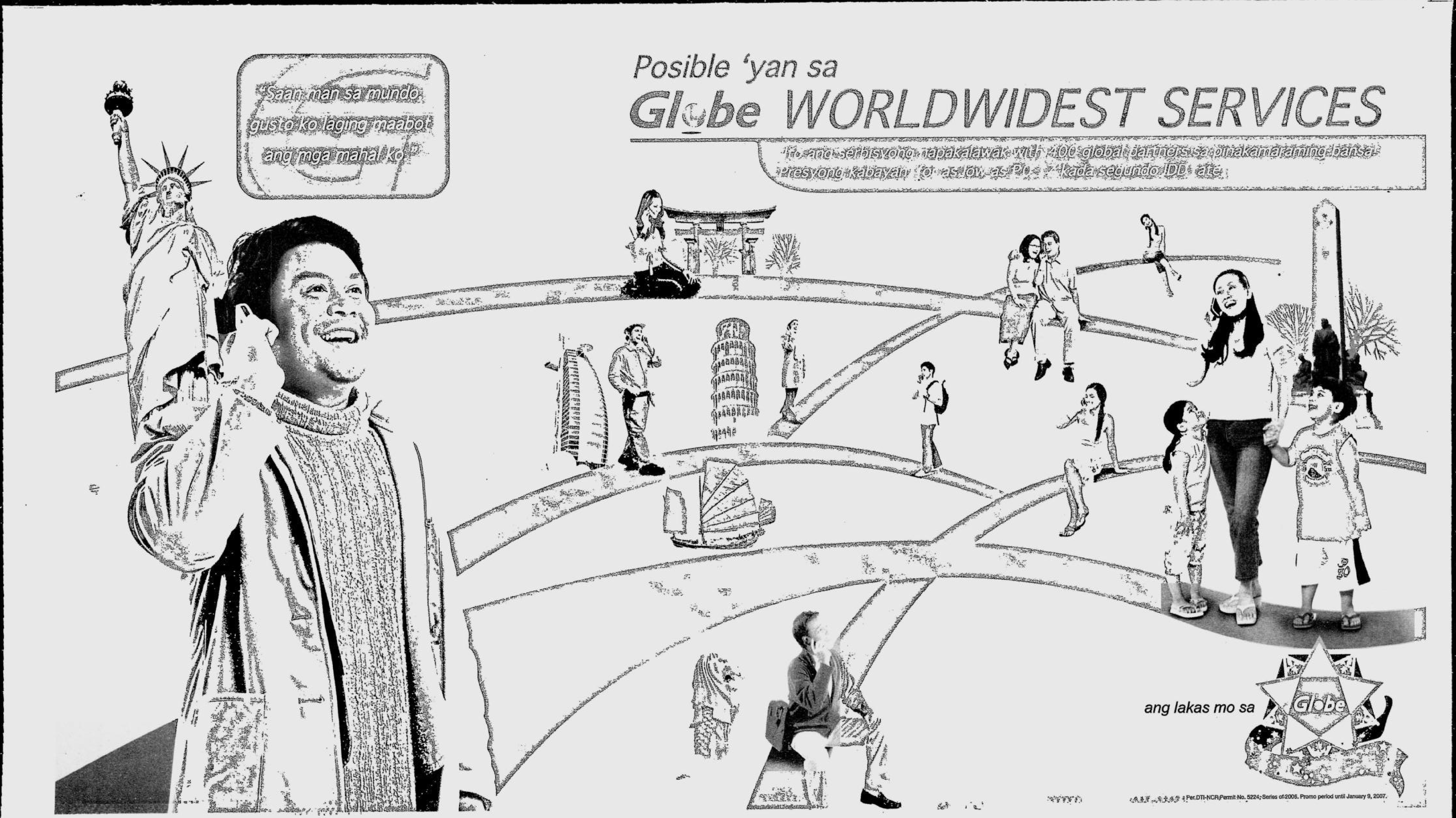
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Christmas inferno kills 24

From page A1

the firecrackers were gunfire, some of those inside the store retreated to the rear.

The fire raged for about seven hours until it was put under control at about midnight.

The tragedy occurred despite repeated warnings from officials for people to be careful in handling fireworks, specially during the present holidays.

Possible liability

Police are investigating the possible liability of the storeowner after initial investigation indicated the owner had no authority to sell firecrackers inside the department store, Eastern Visayas police commander Chief Supt. Eliseo dela Paz told the INQUIRER.

It was the latest of a long list of tragedies blamed on firecrackers to hit the country during the Christmas and New Year holiday season.

On Dec. 31, 2004, seven people were killed when a fire hit a strip of firecracker stalls in Bocaue, Bulacan. That blaze started when a customer asked that a "bomb shell" he wanted to buy be tested. Sparks flew from the defective item, starting the fire that ate up 14 stalls.

On Dec. 18, 1997, two workers were killed and four others suffered burns in a fire that hit an illegal firecracker factory in San Ildefonso, Bulacan.

THICK, black smoke rises as a big department store in Ormoc City burns on Christmas Day. REUTERS

Through the roof

Unitop workers Lolita Tayrus and Emily Ocares, both 18, survived along with several others when they ran into the toilet.

"One of the men grabbed a ladder and went up and kept hammering at the roof and destroyed it," said Ocares, who suffered bruises.

"He shouted at us, *'Halina, halina'* (Come, come)."

With the others, Ocares struggled out through the roof and scampered to an adjacent building.

Ocares said she could no longer remember other details because at some point, she had fainted.

It was not immediately known if the woman shown on television was one of those in Ocares' group.

How it started

SFO4 (Senior Fire Officer) Primitivo Tumilloso said some witnesses told him that the fire started when a child lit a firecracker at the main entrance of the store.

The firecracker explosion triggered bigger blasts from pyrotechnics displayed nearby, causing an air-conditioning unit directly above to explode, according to witnesses.

This triggered the fire that engulfed the building, which used to be a warehouse.

The Office of the Mayor gave the same story.

Different version

But Ormoc police intelligence chief Senior Inspector Reynaldo Gabon gave a different story in a television interview.

He said the boy, left alone by her mother who had queued up to pay for her purchases, was playing with a toy gun when sparks flew from it and ignited the nearby fireworks on display.

"That was how it started," said Gabon.

The boy survived with bruises.

Ormoc Mayor Eric Codilla said those responsible for the incident would face punishment.

Why, why?

Fe Gumatin was inconsolable at losing her 19-year-old daughter, Jennifer, a Unitop salesperson. Jennifer was among the 24 who died.

"She was such a good daughter ... I don't know why this happened to her," the mother said, sobbing uncontrollably at the funeral parlor.

Jennifer, whose father works as a security guard, started working at Unitop just a month ago to help her family, the mother said.

Amelita Layosa, 39, had much to be thankful for. She had gone to the store to buy her 6-year-old son Jerson a toy when the fire started.

A kind soul

She sustained minor injuries in her face and leg. Her boy also survived.

Layosa said a kind soul pulled her and her son out from the burning building amid pandemonium.

"I am happy. I have a reason to be thankful. This serves as my second life," said Ocares, who has been working at Unitop for six months.

She and other survivors were being treated at the Ormoc Sugar Planters Association hospital for minor burns and smoke inhalation.

Two of the survivors, Teresa Tarayo and son Anton Kurl, were in critical condition after suffering serious burns.

The other survivors at the hospital were Daisy Gorre; Neilzenelle Gonzales, 20; Antonio Mejares, 28; Glen Igot, 41, and Glen Burlasa, 18.

Willing to help

Twenty-two of the 24 fatalities have been identified, Mayor Codilla said.

Codilla said the management of Unitop General Merchandise was willing to extend assistance to all the victims.

One of the owners of Unitop in Cebu, who refused to divulge his name, said the Unitop store in Ormoc had a separate management from Unitop-Cebu. The source explained that Unitop-Ormoc has an office based in Manila.

Asked about the store's owners, Codilla said he only knew that they were Taiwanese but he did not know their names.

No authority

He said the lone fire exit of the store was closed when the fire occurred.

"If we determine with finality that the owner of the stall does not have any authority or permit to sell firecrackers then we will file the appropriate charges," Chief Superintendent Dela Paz told the INQUIRER.

The sale, importation and production of firecrackers are supposed to be strictly regulated by the Firearms and Explosives Division (FED) in Camp Crame.

"From what we know, there is no authorized dealer of those particular firecrackers in Ormoc City. The authorized dealers are in Tacloban," Dela Paz said.

Dela Paz stressed that since early this month, he had ordered his men to conduct operations against the illegal sale of firecrackers.

Fiery day in Cebu

Cebu City also had a "fiery" Christmas Day.

A fire gutted several buildings within the capitol before dawn yesterday, destroying at least P5 million worth of property.

The Cebu fire initially razed two buildings when Fire Marshal Esmael Codilla declared it under control.

But the fire continued to spread burning down three more buildings.

Supt. Anderson Comar, Bureau of Fire Protection regional deputy director for operations, said Codilla would have to explain why he prematurely declared the fire under control. ***With reports from Alcuin Papa in Manila, and Jhunnex Napallacan, Inquirer Visayas, Inquirer Research and AP***

Lack of 'safety and survival' culture lamented

By TJ Burgonio

"IT'S A TRAGEDY THAT could have been avoided."

That was how Sen. Richard Gordon, also head of the Philippine National Red Cross, described the department store fire that killed 24 people in Ormoc City on Christmas Day.

He said the high death toll showed the lack of a "culture of safety and survival" among the people and officials in the country.

Basic safety measures should be taught in schools, and these should be complemented by the strict implementation of local ordinances prescribing safety standards in public and private buildings in any town or city, Gordon said.

He proposed the creation of a national safety inspection body that would monitor the implementation of safety standards in any locality.

PNRC has dispatched a team to Ormoc to conduct psychological stress debriefing for the survivors and help trace the relatives of the dead and the injured, Gordon said.

"There could be some more missing who are still unidentified," he said.

Up to 500 burned alive in Nigeria fuel blast

LAGOS—UP TO 500 PEOPLE were burned alive on Tuesday when fuel from a vandalized pipeline exploded in Nigeria's largest city, Lagos, emergency workers said.

Hundreds of residents of the Abule Egba district went to scoop fuel using plastic containers after thieves punctured the pipeline overnight.

"We are talking hundreds (dead). We are yet to confirm the death toll so we don't know if it is 300, 400 or 500," Red Cross secretary general Abiodun Orebiyi said, adding that 60 people had been evacuated to hospital with serious burns.

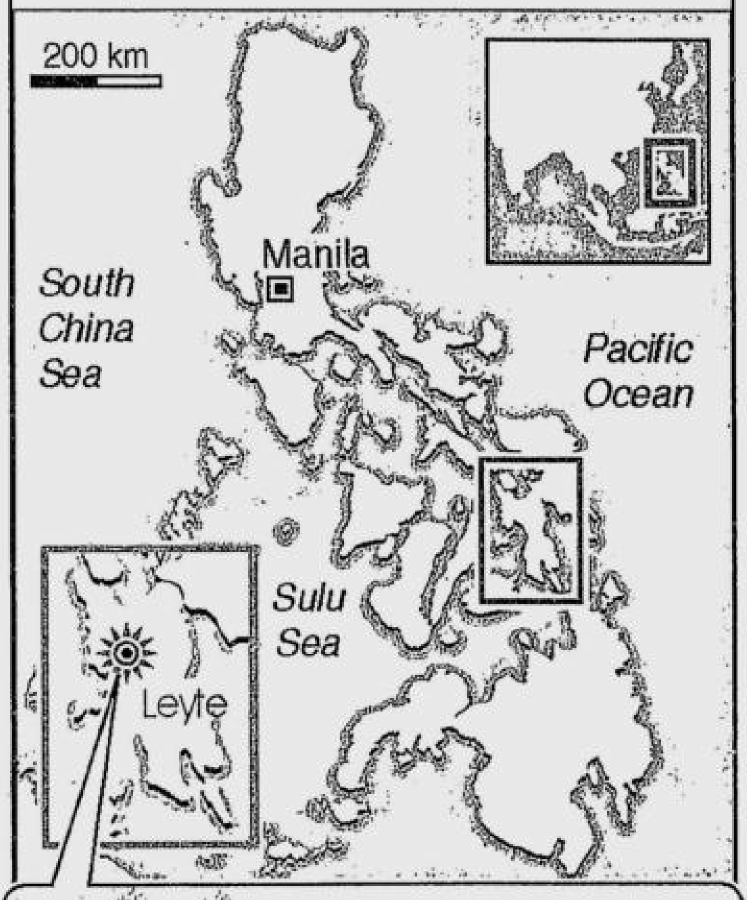
A Reuters witness saw hundreds of bodies, most burned beyond recognition, lying at the scene of the explosion as emergency workers tried to put out the fire.

A Red Cross volunteer at the scene said: "A lot of people have been roasted. They are littered on the ground." A similar explosion in another part of Lagos in May killed about 200 people.

Pipeline vandalism and fuel theft are common in Nigeria, the world's eighth largest oil exporter where most people live in poverty. *Reuters*

ORMOC CITY FIRE

24 people were killed on Monday when firecrackers started a fire in a departmental store, police said



▨ The fire started late on Christmas Day and lasted nearly three hours

▨ Rescuers recovered 23 charred bodies inside and at the door of the toilet, police are unsure how many people are still missing

REUTERS

Murdered Abra lawmaker buried today

From page A1

the P5 million assassination project. Dupo and the three others are at large.

Valera has denied the charge. The governor also said he was unaware of plans by Bersamin, a member of Ms Arroyo's party Kampi, to run for governor in the next May elections, possibly against Valera's wife, who is the incumbent Bangued mayor.

Although there still was no solid evidence against Valera, Gonzalez said he was issuing the hold order to prevent Valera from fleeing the country.

"We have the power to issue the HDO even without a formal complaint. We do not want to mess up the investigation by the disappearance of the suspects," Gonzalez said.

Immigration regulation chief Edgardo Mendoza said the hold order had been dispatched to officers in the country's airports and seaports.

Valera wants to see President

Also in Manila, Presidential Chief of Staff Michael Defensor said yesterday that Valera had contacted him thrice to seek an audience with President Macapagal-Arroyo to request her that he be given a "fair investigation."

Valera has expressed concern at the police investigation and that he felt he was being persecuted politically, said Defensor who told Valera there was no need for him to see Ms Arroyo.

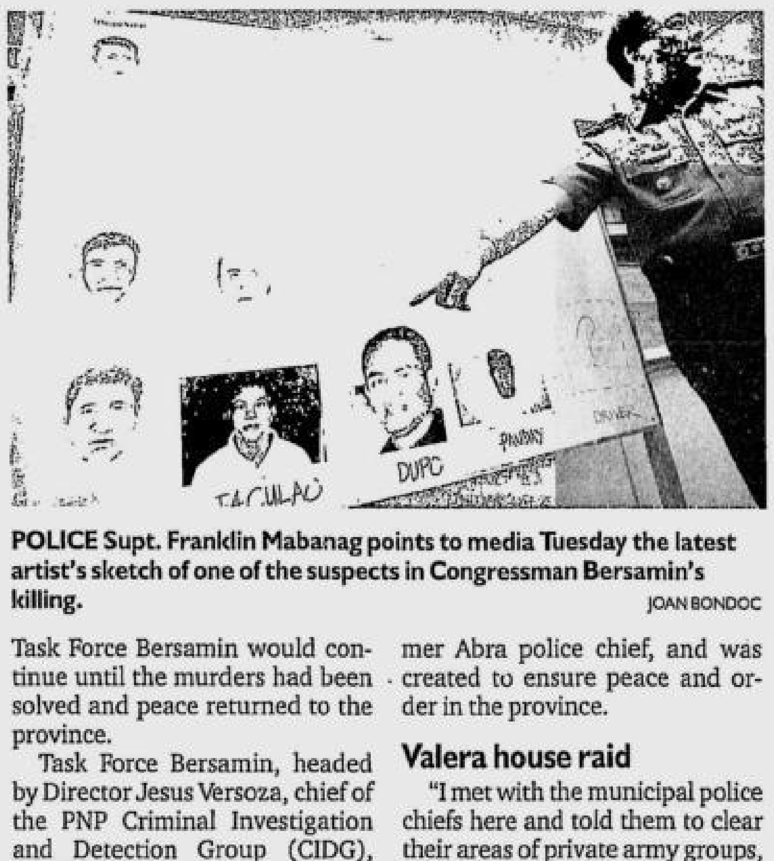
Defensor said he did not inform Ms Arroyo that Valera had called but talked instead with Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno.

Asked whether Valera sought Palace intervention in the investigation, Defensor said "he didn't ask for anything and I don't think this will compromise anything."

"The President's message is very clear and that was for authorities to get to the bottom of the killing and to resolve it," Defensor said.

Firearms ban in Abra

Calderon announced that the election firearms ban, due to begin in mid-January, was now in effect in Abra. He also said bodyguards of the Bersamin family participating in the funeral would be asked not to carry firearms.



POLICE Supt. Franklin Mabanag points to media Tuesday the latest artist's sketch of one of the suspects in Congressman Bersamin's killing. JOAN BONDOC

He said Task Force Abra and Task Force Bersamin would continue until the murders had been solved and peace returned to the province.

Task Force Bersamin, headed by Director Jesus Versoza, chief of the PNP Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG), was formed to solve the killings.

Task Force Abra is headed by Senior Supt. Eugene Martin, former Abra police chief, and was created to ensure peace and order in the province.

Valera house raid

"I met with the municipal police chiefs here and told them to clear their areas of private army groups, criminal gangs and the New People's Army," Calderon said.

Calderon said he would also meet with members of the CIDG team that raided Valera's house in Bangued on Friday. The CIDG team found an unlicensed rifle and several toy guns from the governor's house.

Text messages circulating in Abra said the raids on Valera's house as well as the houses of his allies were nothing but "a moro-moro" (staged) considering the huge cache of weapons the governor supposedly owns.

Charrie Bersamin said her relatives were standing by the family's decision that her father's remains would not stop by the provincial capitol during the funeral procession.

Charrie said the body would be taken to the Abra National High School for the eulogies. Bersamin will be buried at the family mausoleum at the Abra Catholic Cemetery.

Tension in Bangued

She said the families of the other slain politicians in Abra would join the funeral procession.

The atmosphere in Bangued, at least in the central business district, remained tense yesterday.

In the plaza, there were more police officers than promenaders. A steady stream of people attended the wake at Bersamin's house behind the provincial capitol but the carnival atmosphere found in most Filipino wakes was absent.

"People here are silent but I assure you they are behind Bersamin. They are just afraid," said Bangued resident Eugene Biscarra.

Bersamin was the third politician in Abra killed this year. Last month, Board Member James Bersamin, a distant relative of the lawmaker, was gunned down while jogging around the Bangued plaza.

In January, La Paz Mayor Marc Ysrael Bernos was shot dead in his hometown during their town fiesta. Before he was murdered, Bernos, 31, was being groomed to run against Valera in next year's elections.

His vice mayor, Freddie Dupo, disappeared after the murder and is now one of the suspects in the killing of Bersamin. ***With reports from Christine O. Avendaño, Armand N. Nocum, Alcuin Papa and Leila B. Salaverria***

Ban on labor development to Lebanon stays –DFA

JOBSEEKERS SEEKING TO FIND NEW or return to old jobs in Lebanon may still have to wait because of political tensions in that country.

A foreign service official yesterday said previously announced recommendations to lift the ban overseas Filipino workers in that country have remained unacted upon due to a pending assessment of the security situation there.

Foreign Undersecretary Esteban Conejos said Special Envoy to the Middle East Roy Cimatu is set to go to Lebanon in the first week of January to conduct such observation.

Earlier this month, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration said proposals to lift the 5-month-old ban were now in review, and might coincide with the government's implementation of new hiring rules for domestic helpers bound for abroad.

But Conejos cited "ongoing demonstrations" in Lebanon as among the reasons why the situation there was still being "carefully watched."

He was apparently referring to the massive street protests in downtown Beirut led by the militant Hezbollah demanding the resignation of US-backed Prime Minister Fuad Saniora, after the latter rejected calls for the formation of a new national unity government.

In related reports, at least 28 people have died in cluster bomb and land mine explosions in Lebanon since Israel's war with Hezbollah guerrillas ended in a UN-brokered cease-fire on Aug. 14.

Around 11,000 Filipinos, mostly female domestic helpers, fled the fighting. Of these, around 6,000 were airlifted on chartered flights by the government and the International Organization for Migration while the others left the country with their employers, Conejos recalled.

Selling kidneys illegal, DOH tells donors

By Christian V. Esguerra

THIS IS A SEASON OF GIVING but there is no place for Filipinos selling their kidneys, according to the Department of Health.

In a statement, the DOH stressed it was "illegal and unethical" to sell one's kidneys even as it admitted that yearly kidney transplantations accommodate only six to 10 percent of patients suffering from end-stage renal disease (ESRD).

"The small percentage of ESRD patients undergoing transplant operations is commonly attributed to the dearth of kidney donors which the DOH mandates should come primarily from either a cadaver or a living, related donor," it said.

The number of transplants remained measly, although organ transplants performed in the country have increased over the last decade, according to figures cited by the DOH. The highest rate of 40 percent was registered in 2005, 630 compared to only 470 in 2004.

Despite the glaring discrepancy between supply and demand in kidney transplantation, the DOH asked the public not to sell their kidney.

The DOH noted that "abuse and exploitation" of both patient and donor often happens when illegal transactions are arranged by middlemen.

Under the kidney donation guidelines, a donor can't just walk in a hospital and offer his kidney.

A donor is required to go through a battery of tests, including psychiatric evaluation, to determine his or her fitness as well as motive for donating an organ for transplantation.

In a previous interview, Dr. Enrique Ona, chair of the government's National Transplant Advisory Board, told the INQUIRER that the program does not allow a recipient to pay a donor. This would be tantamount to a sale.

But since patients can't always be discouraged from expressing their gratitude, a "gift" isn't exactly improper, according to Ona, who is also director of the National Kidney and Transplant Institute.

"The donor is entitled to what we call a gift of society," he said.

3 fishermen rescued after 10 days adrift

By Leila B. Salaverria

FOR THREE FISHERMEN, salvation came on Christmas Day.

It came in the form of a ship that plucked them from their half-submerged boat in shark-infested waters near Lubang Island, Mindoro, after 10 days adrift.

The three, weak and near death, were among some 200 fishermen from Pangasinan and Zambales who were reported lost in strong winds and waves brought on by the northeasterly *Amihan* winds on Dec. 15, according to the Philippine Coast Guard.

The rescue of Darwin Gonzales, 33, Gilbert Oyando, 45, and Carico Palos, 47, all from Iba, Zambales, brought to 156 the number of fishermen recovered in northeastern coastal waters. Forty-five more fishermen are still missing, many of them from the village of Cato in Pangasinan, where a state of calamity has been declared.

In a report, the PCG said the Panamanian-registered MT Ipsilantis rescued the three fishermen at 10 a.m. on Dec. 25. The tanker, skippered by Capt. Filatov Ivan had come from Singapore and was on its way to the port of Yangin, China.

"It is believed that the three Filipino fishermen drifted at sea for 10 days without food and water," the PCG said.

When alerted about the rescue, the PCG dispatched a fast craft based in Mariveles, Bataan, to fetch the fishermen. They were brought to the nearest hospital in Limay, Bataan.

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Powerful Taiwan quake stirs tsunami alert in RP

From page A1

niversary of the waves that killed more than 200,000 in southern Asia, seismologists said. *(See related story on Page A1.)*

Deputy Director Art Bautista of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said the earthquake did not generate any tsunami, based on information from the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii.

"The bulletin issued by the Pacific tsunami warning center in Hawaii showed that there was no tsunami generated," Bautista told the Inquirer last night.

Precaution

"The precaution we are taking (of alerting concerned agencies) is based on historical data that small waves might affect small islands in the area, including Basco," he said.

Part of the precaution was to advise residents in coastal areas in Northern Luzon to move to higher ground or farther away from the coasts, he said.

The danger of a destructive tsunami caused by a powerful earthquake off Taiwan has passed, Japan's Meteorological Agency said later Tuesday.

"The expected waves did not materialize," Hiroshi Koide of the agency said.

Phivolcs Director Renato Solidum said his agency had alerted the Office of Civil Defense about a tsunami but only as a precaution.

"The earthquake was felt at Intensity 5 in Basco," Solidum said on radio dzBB.

"We have already advised the Office of Civil Defense ... but this is only as a precautionary measure," Solidum added.

"We don't expect a destructive tsunami in the Philippines," OCD chief Glen Rabonza said.

"If the earthquake occurred two hours ago, the tsunami should have hit by now," he told the Inquirer more than two hours after the earthquake occurred. "We are monitoring the situation ... This (tsunami alert) might just be presumption."

Rep. Henedina Abad of Batanes said the provincial chapter of the National Disaster Coordinating Council had been "alerted" to ensure the safety of residents.

Magnitude 7.1

The US Geological Survey said the quake registered magnitude 7.1, while Taiwan's Central Weather Bureau measured it at 6.7.

Two homes in Taiwan's southern city of Pingtung collapsed, trapping six people, ETTV cable news reported. The quake also triggered fires and gas leaks, the station said.

No deaths were immediately reported.

Japan's Meteorological Bureau earlier said the quake triggered a one-meter-high tsunami that it said was headed toward the Philippines.

"There is a possibility of a destructive local tsunami," the Japanese bureau said, saying waves were expected to hit Basco in the Philippines.

"However at some coasts, particularly those near the epicenter, higher tsunami may arrive," it said. "Authorities should be aware of this possibility."

No threat

The Hawaii-based Pacific warning center said there was no threat of a destructive Pacific-wide tsunami, based on historical earthquake and tsunami data, but that it would not know for about an hour what the threat might be to Taiwan or the Philippines.

The quake hit on the second anniversary of a massive earthquake off Indonesia that triggered a powerful tsunami in the Indian Ocean which killed 230,000 people in a dozen countries.

Tuesday's quake was felt throughout Taiwan. It swayed buildings and knocked objects off the shelves in the capital, Taipei, in the northern part of the island.

Phone lines were cut in the southern cities of Kaohsiung and Pingtung, possibly hindering reports of damage by residents, the CTI Cable News reported. Several high-rise hotels swayed violently in Kaohsiung, it said.

The tremor was centered at sea about 23 km southwest of Hengchun on the southern tip of Taiwan. Hengchun is about 450 km south of Taipei. *With reports from Norman Bordadora, Christine O. Avendaño, Michael Lim Ubac, Alcuin Papa, Inquirer Northern Luzon, and AP*

THE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT of Banda Aceh, capital of Aceh province in Indonesia, is reduced to rubble by the tsunami of Dec. 31, 2004.

AP

Survivors remember killer tsunami

From page A1

A dozen fishermen watched gulls circle overhead in one hard-hit Indian hamlet yesterday, staring at the sea and telling stories about villagers who died. Hundreds more gathered as the day went on, some throwing flowers into the water as others lit camphor sticks.

"I cannot forget the events of two years ago, it feels like they happened just yesterday," said Zaldi Setiawan in the worst-hit region of Aceh on Indonesia's Sumatra island.

Like scores of other Acehnese, he prayed Tuesday at mass graves where tens of thousands of people were buried in the days after the disaster, remembering his two children that were ripped from his hands by the waves.

"I can still imagine their faces," he said.

Bali drill

The drill on Indonesia's resort island of Bali—which involved real-time warnings sent from the capital to radios along the beach—was as much about raising awareness as testing technology deployed in the country hardest hit two years ago.

Nearly 167,000 of those killed were from Aceh province—hundreds of kilometers west of Bali—where tens of thousands of people still live in temporary homes.

Sirens wailed as crowds, many of them schoolchildren, briskly walked inland from the shore, accompanied by Indonesia's minister of research and technology and a handful of foreign tourists.

"The biggest challenge is working with the people to make them aware," said German geologist Harald Spahn, who is helping Indonesia set up its alert network. "It is a really complex job that many people underestimate."

Along Andaman coast

In Thailand, ceremonies were being held along the Andaman coast with Buddhist prayers to remember more than 8,200 killed, many of them foreign holiday makers. Balloons will be launched and candles lit along beaches once again filled with sun-seeking foreign tourists.

Dorothy Wilkinson, a 38-year-old from Surrey, England, still has a hard time going near the ocean and cries when talking about her fiance, who was killed in the tsunami along with his parents.

But like scores of other survivors, she felt it was important to return for the anniversary.

"This is a time to remember those people who were lost," she said, adding: "I don't want to spend Christmas at home. It is too lonely."

In Sri Lanka, the resurgence of a civil war has added to the misery of survivors and slowed efforts to rebuild—sparking criticism from outgoing UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who urged Tamil Tiger rebels and the military to lay down their arms.

"No one could have prevented the tsunami's wave of destruction," he wrote in a statement. "But together, we can stem the tide of conflict, which threatens once again to engulf the people of Sri Lanka."

Temple bells chimed to mark the exact time the first wave crashed ashore, and all cars and trucks came to a standstill for two minutes. Looking to the future, the first of 100 warning towers was erected on a beach.

In India, where another 18,000 are believe to have died, interfaith ceremonies were being held and in Malaysia, where 69 people were killed, volunteers were replanting mangroves.

Unprecedented aid

The 2004 tsunami generated an unprecedented outpouring of generosity, with donor pledges reaching some $13.6 billion, but many of those homeless complain they are stuck with poorly built structures that leak, are termite-infested or located in flood zone.

Corruption has also marred the process, with several nongovernment organizations forced to delay projects or rebuild homes after contractors and suppliers ran off with the funds.

Thailand faced fresh questions about possible graft yesterday.

Seven Western nations sent a letter to Thai police saying up to 60 percent of the $1.6 million set aside to help identify the dead in that nation appears to have been misused.

The money may have gone toward travel and other miscellaneous costs, an unnamed US diplomat was quoted as saying in the English-language daily, The Nation, calling for an investigation. *AP*

SCHOOLCHILDREN run for safety during a tsunami drill at Sanur beach in Denpasar, Bali Island on Tuesday.

AFP

IN THE KNOW

SOME KEY FACTS ABOUT THE Dec. 26, 2004 tsunami.

- Toll of dead and missing: 229,361, according to collated figures from government ministries.
- Number of dead and missing in Indonesia: 169,000
- Number of foreigners killed or unaccounted for: 2,672
- Number of countries affected: 13 (Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Madagascar, Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Kenya, Bangladesh)
- Number of people displaced: 2,089,883
- Number of people who lost their livelihoods: 1.5 million
- Ratio of women and children killed to men: 3:1
- Duration of earthquake that triggered the 2004 Asian tsunami: eight minutes
- Total aid pledges, including official aid and private donations: around $13.6 billion, more than enough to rebuild.
- Private donations alone: $5.7 billion.
- Total damages: $10.73 billion; rebuilding costs: $10.375 billion.

Sources: U.N. office of the Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, Oxfam International, Reuters Alertnet, government data

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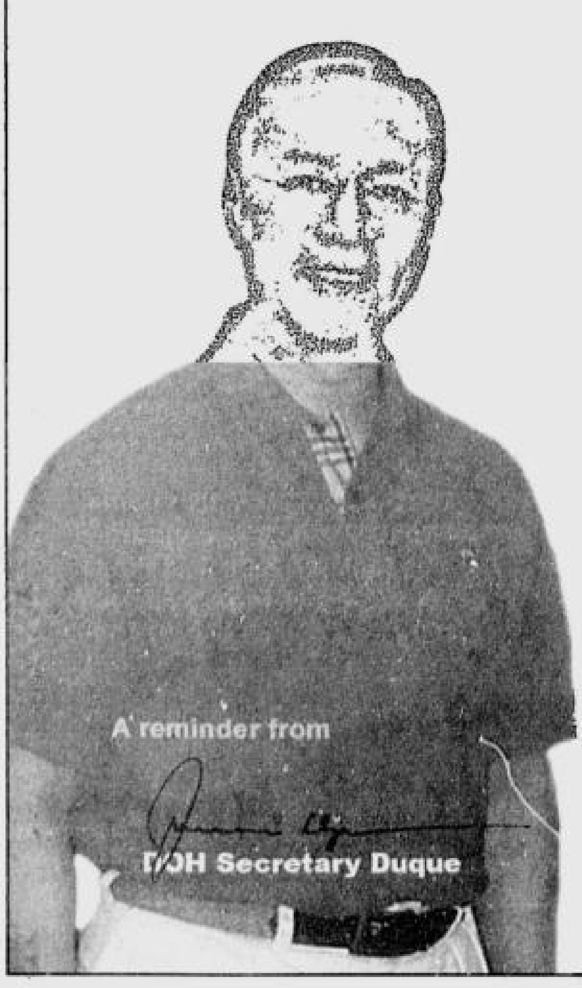
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HEALTH TIPS FOR A SAFE NEW YEAR
Some health tips for a safe New Year
1. Do not use firecrackers during the holidays. Make some noise using alternative noise-makers such as drums, trumpets, " torotot", tambourines, metal pots or pans etc.
2. Do not pick up or relight fireworks that failed to ignite.
3. Do not allow children to play with "Watusi". It is poisonous and can kill.
4. Do not use PVC toy guns and cannons. It is harmful to man and the environment.
5. Do not fire your gun.
Why we should avoid using firecrackers?
1. Lighting firecrackers can cause serious if not fatal injuries.
2. Firecrackers can lead to loss of limbs, lives and properties.
3. Exploding firecrackers emit smoke and dust full of harmful chemicals that worsen the pollution in the air and can cause throat and chest congestion and asthma attacks.
4. Setting off firecrackers and other polluting noisemakers like PVC toy guns and cannons leaves behind residual waste such as paper scraps, cellophane, plastic wrappers and PVC pipes which add up to the piles of holiday trash.
5. Firecrackers produce excessive noise, which can lead to anxiety, stress, sleep disorders and hearing disabilities and may trigger high blood pressure and heart attack.
A reminder from
DOH Secretary Duque

UN okays RP proposal vs global poverty–JDV

From page A1

$2.3 trillion in foreign debt of the Philippines and 101 other heavily indebted countries into equity in mass housing, food production, reforestation, irrigation, education, clean water, anti-AIDS and health care, and other projects.

Philippine Ambassador to the United Nations Lauro Baja described the proposal, which was conceived by De Venecia two years ago, as the "year-end triumph for the Speaker and RP government."

Baja said the next campaign would concentrate on getting the nod of the Paris Club and the G-8 countries—United States, Great Britain, Russia, Germany, Canada, Italy, France and Japan.

In a phone interview, De Venecia said the plan "does not call for debt forgiveness nor moratorium nor debt cancellation nor debt discounts," or even new money from US, European and Japan governments.

"We proposed only that the rich countries, multilateral institutions and large commercial banks plow back into the economies of debtor-countries 50 percent of the debt-service payments due them," he said.

DE VENECIA

Millennium goals

This conversion, he said, would fund the UN Millennium Development Goals, which include halving global poverty.

Under the De Venecia scheme, 50 percent of the Philippine debt-service payment of $1.5 billion a year should not be remitted to creditor countries but instead be converted as their "equity investments" in the country.

Mechanics of the conversion scheme such as the earnings of the equity investments will be drawn up by the Paris Club, said De Venecia.

"The argument for debt conversion is that the poor countries don't have the adequate resources to finance the antipoverty programs under the UN Millennium Development Goals," he said.

Philippine debt stands at P5 trillion, five times bigger than the annual national budget.

Late last year, the General Assembly merely "took note" of the proposal, which was supported by President Macapagal-Arroyo and Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo.

This came after Ms Arroyo and De Venecia formally presented the debt-conversion strategy at the United Nations in September 2005.

De Venecia also presented the debt-conversion strategy in speeches to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank at the time.

The Speaker arrived in New York City on Dec. 22 to receive the news at the United Nations following earlier endorsement of his plan by outgoing UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Indonesian President Yudhoyono, Pakistani Premier H. Aziz and Cambodian Premier Hun Sen.

Birthday gift

De Venecia, who celebrated his birthday yesterday by attending Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan, said the UN approval was a "birthday gift to him and the Filipino nation."

In return, he said his staff distributed lunch boxes to 5,000 urban poor families in Metro Manila and Pangasinan during his birthday.

The Spanish government adopted the De Venecia proposal into law a few weeks ago, following endorsements by Romanian and Bulgarian governments and by leaders of the G-77 countries, which now number 132 of the 192 members of the UN.

De Venecia said the Christian Democrats representing 110 political parties in Europe, Latin America and Africa met last month at the Canary Islands and supported his proposal.

Much earlier, 90 Asian political parties meeting in Seoul for the International Conference of Asian Political Parties and representatives of 33 Asian parliaments at the Asian Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Iran endorsed the debt-for equity plan.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Inter-Parliamentary Organization summit in Cebu early this month also adopted the proposal.

De Venecia reported to Ms Arroyo by phone before Christmas and asked the President, Romulo and UN representative in the Philippines Elma Noble to include the proposal in the Asean and East Asean Summit in Cebu next month.

De Venecia, who is invited by the Asean summit to address the meeting of presidents and prime ministers, asked for the Asean's endorsement of the UN approval. *Michael Lim Ubac*

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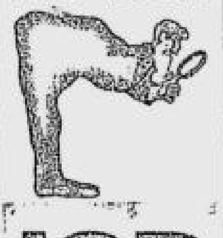

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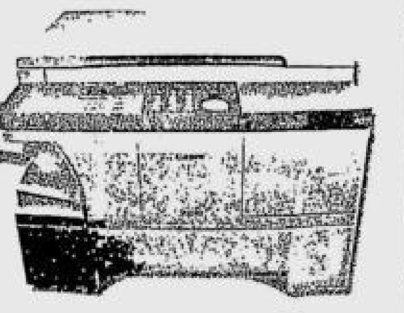

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Aging pets work out in gyms . . .

From page A1

hind legs, and unwinds with a hot spa and massage session.

The boom in pet ownership in Japan has led to a new phenomenon—legions of elderly animals that doting masters pamper with fortified food and vitamins, aromatherapy and even acupuncture.

"I want to do everything I can for Andy. He's part of the family," said Aya Ashiya, 50, as she ran around the swimming pool with a squeeze toy, cheering the husky on during a recent session at the dog aqua fitness gym El Pero.

"We've been together for so long, and we've really learned to communicate," Ashiya said. "I just want him to stay healthy for as long as possible."

Longevity

Though figures are scarce, a study published last year showed that longevity for cats in Japan almost doubled between 1991 and 2003, from 5.1 years to 9.9 years. Dog longevity surged from 8.6 years to 11.9 years.

Researchers attribute the jump to better health care, more vaccinations, a more balanced diet and a new trend of pets being allowed to live in homes—once unthinkable in a country of *tatami*-mat houses.

But longer lives have led to ailments seldom seen before in pets in Japan, such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease and dementia, said Hideki Hayashidani, an assistant professor at the Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, who carried out the longevity study.

"Japanese attitudes toward pets have changed radically. Owners dote over them like children," Hayashidani said. "That means fewer pups and kittens die from infections, while cancer and heart disease cases have hit the roof ... And owners will pay anything to keep their pets alive longer."

More pets than kids

Japan's doting owners have helped push pet spending to new highs. The pet industry here topped $8.6 billion in 2005. That's only a quarter of expenditures in the United States, but for Japan represents a 40-percent increase since 1994.

In a sign of the nation's growing obsession with animal companions, industry figures show Japanese families now own over 23 million pet dogs and cats, exceeding the number of Japanese children under 15, which hit a new low of 17.46 million in 2006.

Kyuta, an 8-year-old long-haired Chihuahua, started biweekly acupuncture sessions at the Kamakura Genki Animal Hospital after severe back pain struck last year.

At a recent session, the dog yelped as a veterinarian inserted 13 needles into his quivering back and hind legs, but soon settled down in his owner's arms.

"Kyuta loves coming here. His tail goes right up when he gets on the examination table," said Emi Matsuya, 43, a Tokyo hairdresser.

The two travel two hours each way by train for the acupuncture sessions, which cost $47, Matsuya said, and the Chihuahua eats homemade meals of meat and vegetables now that he is getting older.

Happiness

"Dogs crave attention. That's what makes them happy. And happy dogs live longer," said hospital director Takashi Ishino, who also offers massage and aromatherapy treatments.

Japan's aging dogs also benefit from specially designed care items such as doggie diapers, harnesses that support aging pooches on walks, and pet strollers. Elderly cats have their own products, including climbing towers with extra padding.

And owners can take a break from their pets by getting a nursing care specialist. Keiko Himi, who runs the pet-sitting service "Nyan to Wonderful" northeast of Tokyo, says an increasing number of owners ask her to care for aging pets while they run errands or work.

"Caring for old pets is a big burden for the owner, physically and emotionally," Himi said. "In one case, I went to help a family every day through their dog's last days."

Death doesn't end the pampering. A spate of companies offers everything from pet cemeteries, funerals and memorials to counseling for grieving owners. Tokyo's Japan Pet Ceremony Co. runs a 24-hour funeral hot line; the Machida Izumi Joen cemetery offers the ultimate in owner-pet companionship—a shared grave.

"It's all about giving dogs a certain quality of life," said Ashiya, the owner of the Siberian husky. "We're not going to give up just because Andy's old ... not as long as I have the energy, time, and money." *AP*

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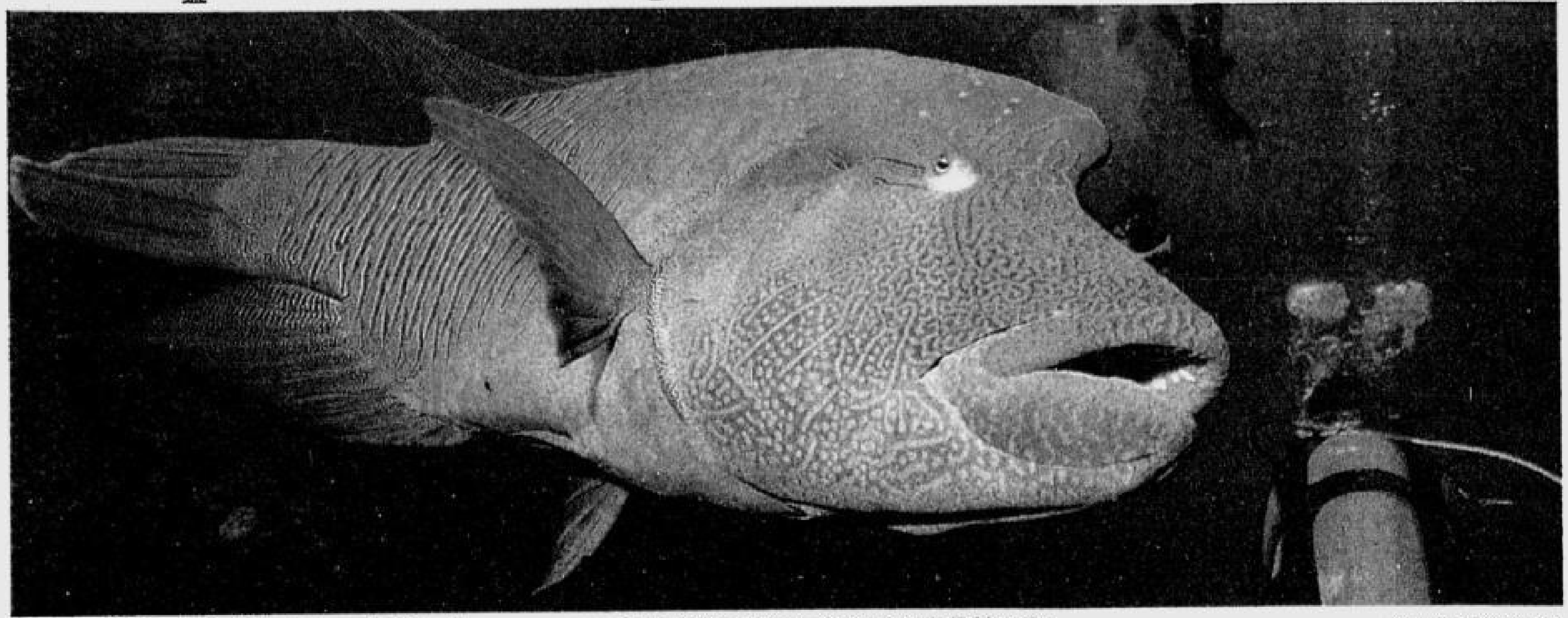
Sino poachers caught with endangered fish in Tubbataha



ENDANGERED species like this beautiful Napoleon wrasse were found in the Chinese fishing boat in Tubbataha. YVETTE LEE/CONTRIBUTOR

By Marlon Ramos
Inquirer Southern Luzon

CALAMBA CITY— THIRTY CHINESE fishermen were caught in possession of endangered fish species when their vessel was inspected while passing inside the protected Tubbataha National Marine Park.

Angelique Songco, Tubbataha Management Office (TMO) manager, said Tuesday that 300 pieces of live Napoleon wrasse fishes, locally known as Mameng, 500 Lapu-lapu and 500 red snappers were found inside the vessel when park guards inspected it last Dec. 21.

Aside from violating the provincial ordinance banning the entry of commercial fishing vessels within the Tubbataha Reefs, the Chinese fishermen also violated the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act.

They also face charges for violation of the Fisheries Code and Wildlife Act of the Philippines after park guards recovered 300 live Mameng from their boat.

Songco said aside from her office, BFAR and the provincial government of Palawan, the Department of Environment and National Resources will also file similar charges.

Charges galore

If found guilty, the Chinese nationals could be jailed from 12-20 years and pay a fine of P120,000 each.

Songco said the Chinese nationals had passports and temporary visit permits.

According to papers presented by the owner, the vessel came from Bonggao, Tawi-Tawi and was caught by the marine park staff on Dec. 21.

She said that while the suspects were not caught fishing inside Tubbataha, "the mere entry inside the park is unlawful."

The Chinese fishermen had claimed that they bought the fishes from local fishermen.

But the possession and trade of Mameng is prohibited under the Convention for the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), she said.

Songco said the Philippines is one of the signatories of CITES.

She said the owner likewise claimed that the crew unknowingly entered the national marine park.

"That's impossible. They know (from their charts) that the park is located within three miles away from the reefs," she said.

Songco said she also doubted the claims of the crew that they were not fishing after 11 sampans (small boats) and several air compressors were found aboard the boat.

She said it was possible that the Chinese nationals used the items in their illegal fishing activities.

Illegal fishing gear

A boat from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) is set to arrive to escort the 353-ton fishing vessel of the arrested Chinese from one of the islands within the Tubbataha Reefs where it is currently held by park guards.

"We expect the boat of the BFAR to arrive here (at our office in Puerto Princesa City) on Wednesday noon. It will immediately depart for Tubbataha so we can present the Chinese poachers before the prosecutor's office in Puerto Princesa on Thursday," she said in a mobile phone interview.

Songco said aside from the crew members of the vessel, they will also file charges against its supposed owner, who identified himself as Fong Kwan Kong.

Kwan, she said, had repeatedly threatened to sue her for holding the Chinese nationals and their boat.

"The owner alleged that they have proper documents to prove that their operation was legal. He actually threatened me, saying I have no right to hold his crew. But I am not afraid because they really violated the laws," she said.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Wednesday, December 27, 2006
St. John, Apostle & Evangelist

1st Reading: 1 Jn 1:1-4
Gospel: John 20:1, 2-8

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala ran to Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved. And she said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have laid him."

Peter then set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down and saw the linen cloths lying flat, but he did not enter.

Then Simon Peter came following him and entered the tomb; he, too, saw the linen cloths lying flat. The napkin, which had been around his head was not lying flat like the other linen cloths but lay rolled up in its place. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and believed.

Commentary

John proclaims in his letter what he has seen and known himself intimately, and touched: that the Word became visible among us. He seeks to share this life so freely given with his children of faith, so that joy may abound. John writes from long exile, in punishment for speaking this Word of truth. John is the first of the beloved disciples, who saw and believed and lived rejoicing in the love of God given to us in Jesus; God's Word of unbounded love to all the earth.

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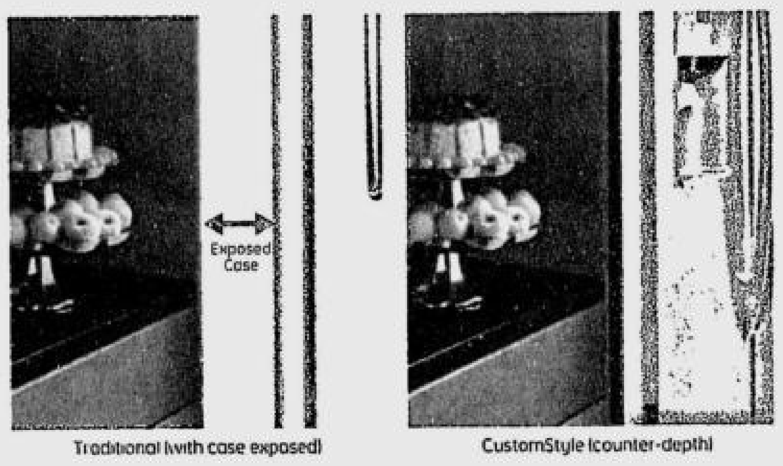

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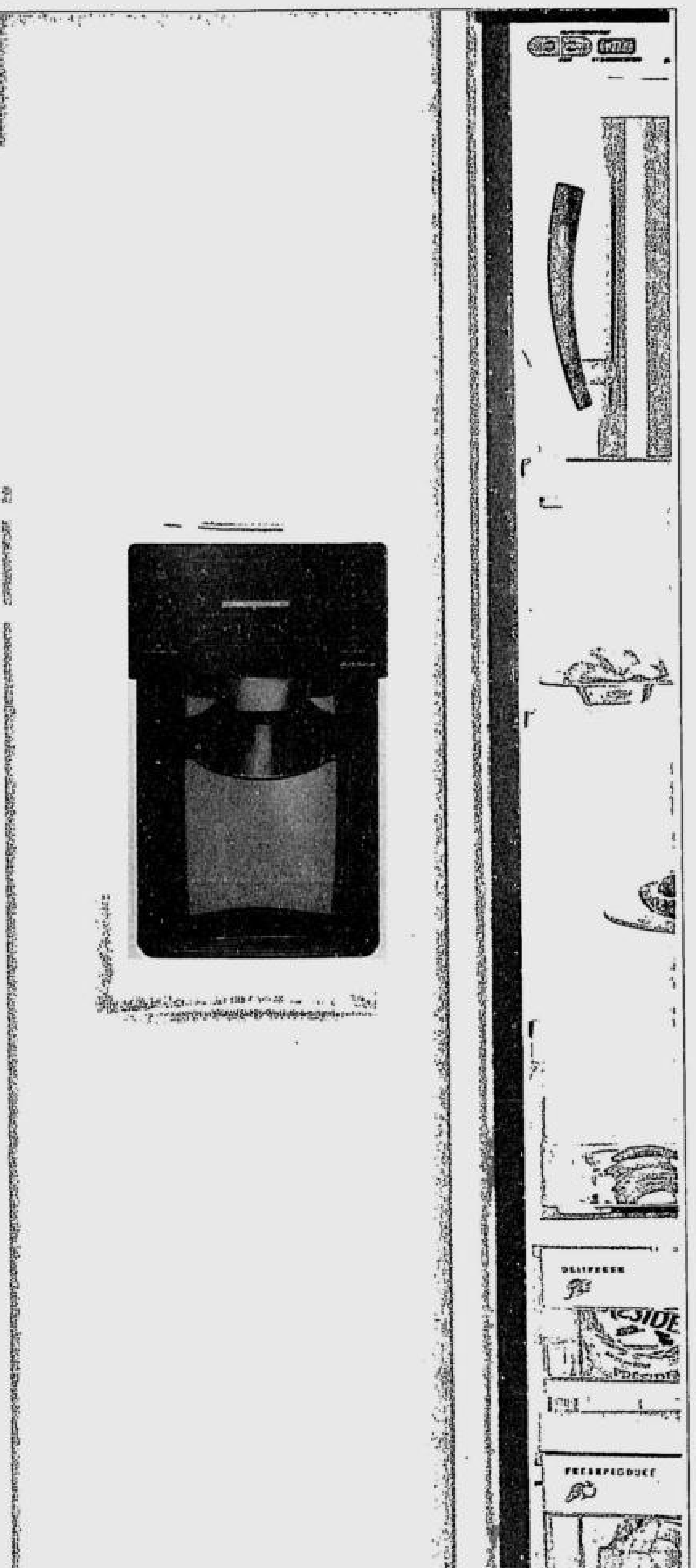

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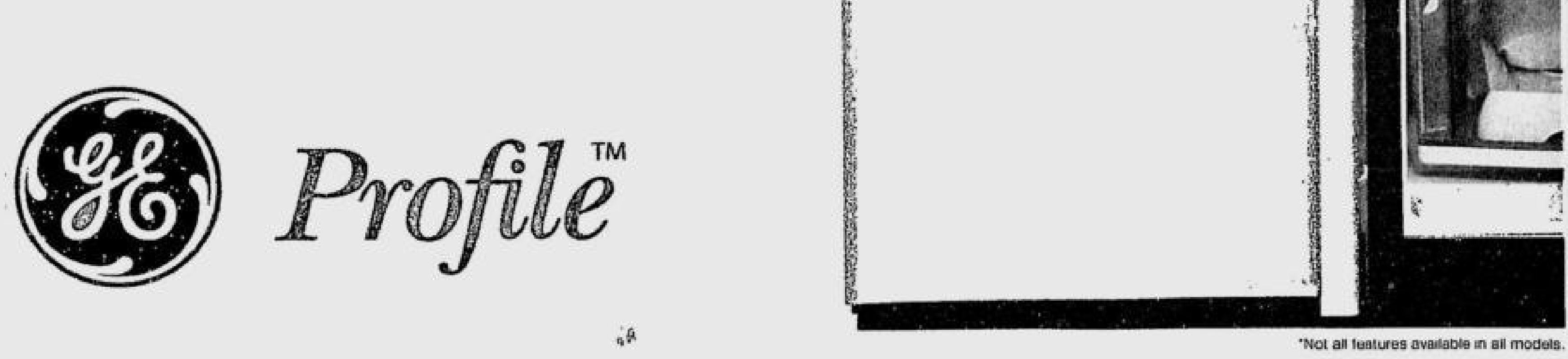

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OPINION

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Slain innocents

EDITORIAL

AS TOLD IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, AFTER THE wise men visited the Infant Jesus, King Herod heard of the visit and was filled with jealousy and rage. He ordered the killing of all male infants in Bethlehem and the surrounding countryside so as to liquidate the Messiah.

Christian tradition honors the massacred children, calling them Holy Innocents, and claiming them as martyrs who are commemorated in the West on Dec. 28 and in the East on the 29th.

Our own holiday season was grimly inaugurated by the assassination of an Abra congressman. Overlooked was a poor 13-year-old boy who became an innocent casualty of that political crime. The boy was hit by a stray bullet and taken to a hospital, the latest in a long and generally anonymous catalogue of women and children whose only crime has been to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, as the ruthless contest power.

The past year has been a grim one, in terms of activists and journalists being caught in the crosshairs of assassins or being the target of grenade attacks. On the whole, these killings have gone unpunished.

But these haven't been the only crimes of political opportunism. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines has pointed out that the dismal human rights record of the military and police, including provincial militias, must be joined to the reprehensible acts of rebels who have engaged in their share of political murder and intimidation.

The collapse of the peace process, particularly in the case of the communist insurgency, has returned large swathes of the country to a virtual no-man's land, where rebels and government forces both engage in human rights violations, with neither side interested in anything more than claiming the atrocities are the responsibility of the other side.

Add to this the killings undertaken for political or financial vendetta, by warlord armies that have moved in after military mopping-up operations, to further intimidate labor and peasant organizers; or the bodyguards or paid agents of politicians who, unsure if elections are going to push through, are now doing their butchery double-time to pave the way for elections; and finally, add to this the killings due to theft and hold-ups that have gone wrong—and we have a nation teetering on the edge of anarchy and lawlessness in too many places, while too few places can be said to be under the authentic rule of law.

It is the absence of the law and the failure of our legal system to uphold peace and order that turn the innocents of our society into life-long victims. For while there are many children who die in the crossfire, there are many more who find their lives permanently scarred by fear and loss. The child who witnesses a political murder, or who is turned into a refugee by military and rebel activities, or who loses a parent or sibling to terrorism or other kinds of aggression, is a child more likely than not to become an adult callous to the consequences of killings. Where there is rebellion and counterinsurgency, there you see child-soldiers being recruited.

The transformation of children into combatants for one side or another, when both sides should be doing more to keep them out of harm's way, is the unacknowledged supreme cost of the culture of impunity. If all sides view human rights abuses, including political killings, as something only the other side commits, and therefore for which each side believes it is never answerable, they will not stop. And we will only have more slain innocents.

In this season, then, of the Prince of Peace, as the country marks a brief cessation of hostilities, all sides need to reflect on the price of the struggle that will resume with the New Year. Rebels and soldiers will resume their operations, and to the mayhem and confusion their operations create will be added the shadowy activities of assassins hired by the countless political factions which don't trust the ballot but only have faith in the bullet.

And yet the solution is there, for those who would use it: to declare local communities zones of peace, where innocents can remain innocent and unblemished by conflict. But it requires resolve and an unyielding refusal to compromise with any and all sides that insist that the solution to a problem is the gun.

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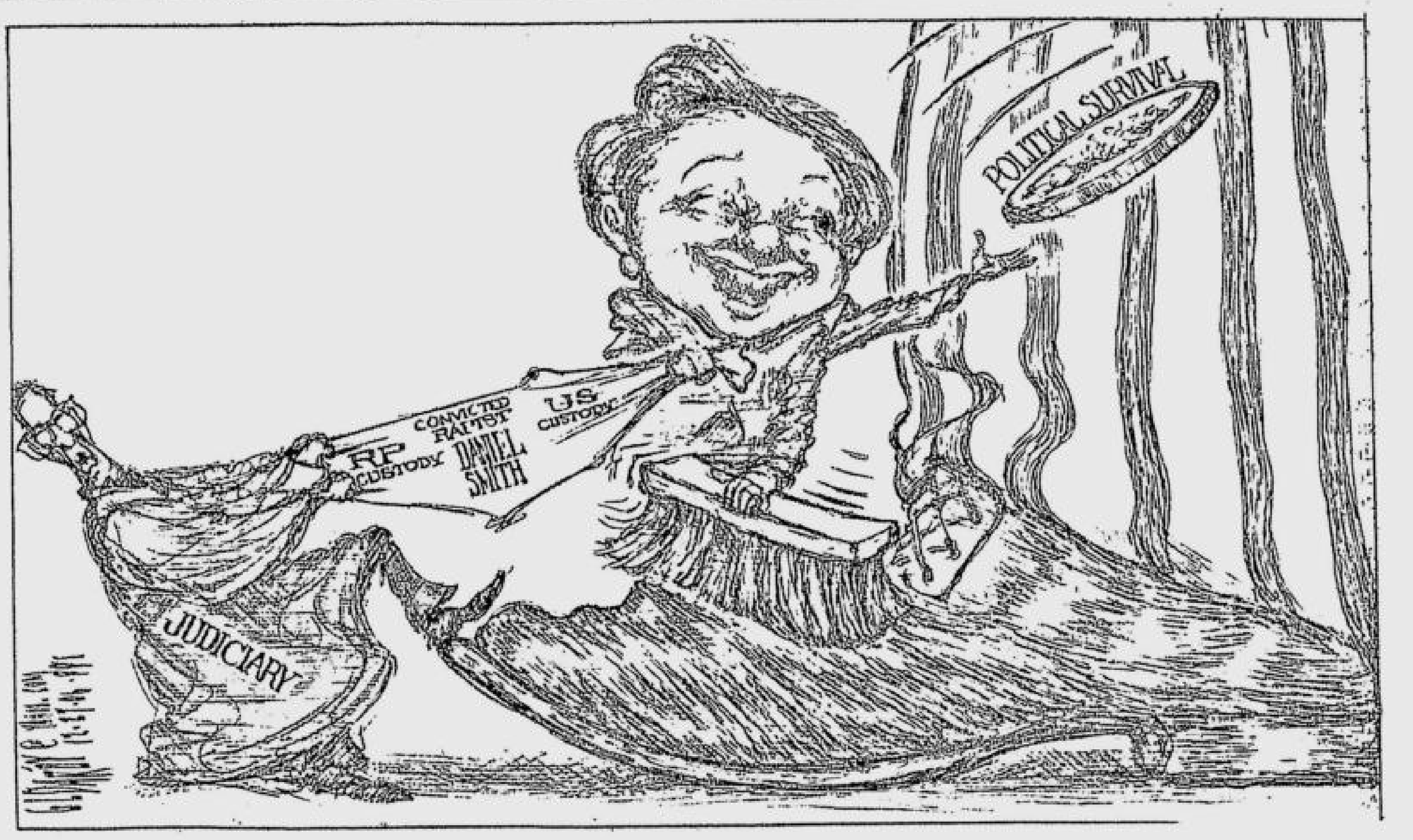

Of congressmen and squatters

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

YOU HAVE PROBABLY ALREADY READ THE letter of Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman in the Letters section of the INQUIRER's Christmas issue. In the letter, Lagman defends himself from the complaints of Bicolanos (mentioned in this column of Dec. 15 and in another INQUIRER column of Dec. 10) that he and another Bicolano congressman (Luis Villafuerte) were in the Batasan railroading the hated Cha-cha express while they were still reeling from the ravages of the supertyphoons that roared through the region. Lagman claims he was in Albay helping his constituents while at the same time leading the Cha-cha charge in the House, flying between Manila and Albay all that time.

We cannot expect Lagman to admit such a shameful act. But we can expect him to throw up an alibi to defend himself. Let us give him the satisfaction of thinking that he has convinced the public with the alibi that he did his duty to his constituents as well as his duty to his lords and masters in the House and Malacañang.

But what about this report, also from Albay, that during the relief work, goods supplied by the Department of Social Welfare and Development and intended for the typhoon victims were withheld for distribution by workers of Lagman until they could stamp the name of his son, who is running for mayor, on the packages? The people were starving and cold and roofless, and the food and supplies were there but were withheld because of politics, despite the pleas of the bishop to distribute them. The people were made to suffer and wait while Lagman's workers put the name of his son on the packages, which were provided by the DSWD and not by Lagman and his son. The bishop was reported to be so angry that when the supplies were finally released, he refused to accept them.

* * *

And what about this incident, broadcast on television and witnessed by hundreds of thousands of viewers, where Quezon City Rep. Annie Rose Susano boasted on the floor of the House during the debates on Cha-cha that the Catholic Church cold not protest against Charter change because she had just "donated P4 million to the Church." The records of the House should contain this quote from Susano: *"Hindi makakapiyok ang Simbahan kasi binigyan ko 'yan ng apat na milyon."*

Susano's wealth from real estate is legendary in Novaliches which she represents, but boasting about her "donation" to make the Church follow her wishes makes it sound like a bribe. I am surprised that there was not even a whimper from the Church to protest this boast, although the prayer rally at the Luneta sponsored by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines is proof that the Church cannot be bribed.

* * *

If Susano is so rich that she can donate millions to the Church just like that, why doesn't she provide funds to finish Congressional Avenue which is in her district? This street, which should help decongest Commonwealth Avenue, has been left unfinished for decades. Running from Edsa, opposite Roosevelt Avenue, to Luzon Avenue and parallel to Commonwealth and Quezon Avenues, work on Congressional has gone in fits and starts for many years. Only a little more than one kilometer remains to be finished. Why is it taking such a long time? Red tape, neglect and, according to the Department of Public Works and Highways, lack of funds.

Two lanes of the six-lane street were paved partly with the pork barrel of former Rep. Chuck Mathay. But now that Susano has replaced Mathay, work has stopped again.

I saw signs on Commonwealth that Susano funded, from her own pork barrel, the widening of that avenue. But why is she not doing the same for Congressional which is in her district? Is it because Congressional was funded by her rival Mathay? But those who would be benefited won't be Mathay but her constituents living in subdivisions lining Congressional, who now have to pass through other subdivisions and pay numerous sticker fees in order to get to their homes. When Congressional is finally finished, it will provide outlets to these subdivisions and end the wrangling and court cases over stickers by homeowners' associations.

If Susano, who goes to Congress in all-white Rolls Royce and clad in an all-white suit, is so rich, why doesn't she use some of her pork barrel (not even her personal wealth) to finish Congressional? And if she is really the real estate magnate that they say she is, why doesn't she build medium-rise housing for the squatters who would be displaced by the project?

* * *

Enough of the bad news. it's still the Christmas season after all. Here's some good news: Congressional Avenue will finally be connected to its other end, across Tandang Sora, but not the other end to Luzon Avenue. There are now funds for the right-of-way across Tandang Sora, but it was provided, not by Susano or the DPWH, but by Mayor Feliciano Belmonte. Quezon City is now the richest city in the country, thanks to Belmonte, which is why it can afford to fund projects that are the responsibility of the national government, such as Congressional Avenue.

But that is also why Quezon City residents are wondering why Belmonte is not using some of that money to erase the image of his city as the "squatter capital of the Philippines." Why doesn't he build more medium-rise homes for squatters to erase this blight, and use the resources of the government to prevent the entry of more squatters? I am sure the city will earn even more from taxes if all those land occupied by squatters are developed and put to better use.

Good God

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

LAST FRIDAY, THE KAPATIRAN PARTY CAME out with a full-page ad in the INQUIRER. The ad invited people to join it and run under its banner in the May elections. The brainchild of Gunless Society exponent Nandy Pacheco, Kapatiran pitches itself as the antithesis of *trapo* politics.

Its agenda is one any God-fearing, civic minded, or just plain decent person can subscribe to. The only thing in it that I think will be harder to push than ending corrupt politics is ending "sports whose main purpose is to inflict physical harm or violence on the opponent." I can't see Manny Pacquiao's legions of fans in this country harking to that cry.

I asked Pacheco how many candidates Kapatiran would be fielding this May and what positions they would be seeking. He answered with his usual fervor that he doesn't know that yet, and that is precisely the reason they are inviting potential candidates to the party. Their very process is anti-*trapo*. The *trapo* method is to start with individuals or personalities and build platforms from them. In Kapatiran, they start with the platform and draw believers to the fold.

The *trapo* system is for individuals or personalities to be bigger than their parties. The politicians who join those parties do not do so because they believe in what the parties stand for, they do so because they believe in what their standard-bearers can do for their careers. That is why they think nothing about switching parties. That weighs as much upon the conscience as changing clothes. In Kapatiran's case, the people who will join it have only their convictions to reward their decision. Kapatiran does not offer much by way of resources, but it offers much by way of principles.

Their candidates will not spend a fortune to run for public office. They are banking on the voters, with the help of the Church and other institutions that champion morality, to see that candidates who spend a fortune to win office will extract an even bigger fortune from them after they do. The Kapatiran candidates will merely offer honesty and good government, with their own reputations or life's work to commend their cause.

Quixotic quest? Batty idealism?

Maybe. But before we dismiss it as such, let us look a little at ourselves and see if the problem does not lie there. Indeed, let us look a little at our world and see if this project or experiment is the one that is standing on its head or we are. Elsewhere, the idea that parties come first before members is the most commonsensical thing in the world. Elsewhere, the notion purveyed by exponents of Cha-cha, which is that you can have a parliamentary system while having no real parties, or where parties follow the ambitions of individuals and not where individuals subscribe to the beliefs of parties, would be the battiest thing in the world. Here the opposite is true. Maybe we should ask ourselves if we haven't gotten so used to looking at things upside down that we keep finding quixotic, batty, or plain wrong the things that are really standing right side up.

We keep complaining that we have no choice but to choose between GMA and Erap. That is batty. This country has never lacked for alternatives. It is not even a question of wit, or the ability to discern them. It is merely a question of will, or the willingness to act on them. That was plain to see in the last elections. Why should the contest be reduced only to a choice between GMA and FPJ? There were other candidates, and far more moral ones. To this day, I believe Raul Roco would have made a good president, notwithstanding that he would have served all too briefly, and notwithstanding that his personality would not have endeared him to a lot of people.

But the self-styled political pundits said the others were not "winnable." Seemingly savvy, that in fact is standing the world on its head. What makes candidates "winnable" is that we want to vote for them. What makes candidates win is that we vote for them. We refuse to want to vote for a jerk, he does not become "winnable." We refuse to vote for a jerk, he does not win. Other of course than by calling up Garci and employing the services of Esperon. Candidates do not become winnable by an act of God or by something that inheres in their person. They become winnable because of a power we hold in our hands. That is the vote.

I've said it again and again: The only thing worse than being powerless is having the power but not using it. And the only thing worse than that is having the power but not seeing it.

Are projects like Kapatiran quixotic and batty? Or have we just become jaded or blind? The Church has a point when it talks of character change rather than Charter change. But that is so in a deeper sense than the bishops themselves allow. We do need to acknowledge our own contribution to the mess that is this country. We do need to start doing what is right if only to end what is wrong.

The problem about political alternatives is not unlike corruption. As I keep telling audiences, we all like to damn public officials for having no honest bone in their bodies and hope to God lightning strikes them where they stand. But come the baptism or wedding of our children, who do we get as their *ninong* and *ninang*? Do we get the upright public school teacher down the street who can barely make ends meet, or the *barangay* captain at the other end of the same street who everyone knows to be dedicated only to collecting *tong* from drivers and vendors? You pick the first and people will laugh at you and call you stupid.

I do know Nandy Pacheco has been called many names. Well, I guess he deserves it. He is guilty of the most heinous crime in this country today: He is guilty of decency. And, worse, wanting to spread it.

Palestine's necessary civil war

WORLD VIEW

Barry Rubin

REGARDLESS OF THE LATEST HASTILY NEGOtiated truce, the battle between nationalist Fatah and Islamist Hamas seems to be gaining intensity. Palestinian politics, always self-destructive, has reached new heights of internal conflict, pulling the population deeper into disorder and pushing them further away from statehood.

The movement's remarkable ability to sabotage itself is not new. In the late 1960s, the Palestine Liberation Organization, led by Fatah, antagonized its Jordanian hosts until they expelled it by force. During the 1970s, the PLO entered Lebanon's civil war, wearing out its welcome there. The sole issue on which Israel, Syria and Lebanese political leaders agreed in the 1980s was that the PLO should be thrown out of Lebanon. During the 1990s, the PLO botched its opportunity to govern the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, create a stable and development-oriented regime there, and make peace with Israel.

Rejecting a deal with Israel in 2000, Fatah instead launched a violent revolt that has lasted ever since then, destroying the infrastructure built up in the Palestinian territories during the previous decade. Massive foreign aid was stolen, squandered, or wrecked by unnecessary violence.

When Yasser Arafat, the perennial PLO, Fatah and Palestinian Authority leader, died, Palestinians in theory had a chance to end this history of disasters. Yet Arafat's replacement, Mahmoud Abbas, was a colorless, not particularly strong figure with no real political or military base of his own.

During the 1990s, as the challenge from Hamas steadily grew, Arafat thought he could use the Islamists—after all, he was basically one himself—and refused to curb them. He was notorious for refusing to build strong institutions. So once Arafat died, the roof caved in on Fatah.

Three main factors brought Hamas into leadership in the January 2006 parliamentary elections. First, Arafat's legacy left Fatah and the PLO completely undisciplined. Its deep divisions meant that Fatah candidates split the vote and ensured a Hamas landslide.

Second, Fatah never gave Palestinians any alternative vision. Apart from a few scattered speeches—some by Abbas himself—it never accepted peace and compromise. In this respect, Fatah was not much different from Hamas, and the two competed to prove who waged terrorism better and was more militant.

Finally, Fatah did a terrible job at governing, bringing Palestinians neither material benefits nor a state. Instead, it brought massive corruption and administrative incompetence, together with breathtaking arrogance. When I predicted Hamas' victory before the election, Fatah's campaign manager replied, "Everyone will vote for Abbas and everything will be all right." But while Abbas remains chief executive, Hamas controls the parliament and the government.

Yet Fatah was hardly going to give up. One of Fatah's few remaining assets is that the West, horrified by Hamas' more open hate-mongering and extremism, has largely boycotted the new Palestinian regime and cut off aid. With Hamas allied to Iran and Syria, Fatah has seemed more attractive in geopolitical terms.

On this issue, however, there are unfortunate realities that few will admit. Instead, the West continues to believe that there is still a chance of Arab-Israeli peace, that this problem is the region's centerpiece, that Hamas might become more moderate, and that Fatah and Hamas can somehow create a government of national unity.

People of good will who want a real negotiated solution, with Israel and Palestine living peacefully as neighbors, simply don't want to face the fact that any such deal is now decades away. In Palestinian politics, total victory and Israel's destruction is still preferable to an honest assessment that this goal is unattainable, terrorism must be abandoned, and law and order must be imposed.

But Fatah is almost as extreme as Hamas. Anarchy rules, and there is no one with the vision and strength to end it. Dozens of international plans and proposals collapse one after the other. The current "ceasefire" with Israel is violated by the daily salvos of missiles fired from Gaza, while ceasefires among Palestinians have typically been broken by gunfire and assassination attempts within a few hours.

Now Abbas has called for new elections, which Hamas rejects, and it seems unlikely that he has the capacity to impose his will. Many people advocate the simple expedient of "strengthening Abbas" as a moderate, but one cannot strengthen a wet noodle.

The irony is that real change could come about only from a civil war won by moderates. But the Palestinians are not engaged in a civil war pitting moderates versus extremists. The reciprocal low-level violence between Hamas and Fatah is simply a struggle fueled by greed and patronage. There are limits to how far that struggle will go, but the Palestinians are not going to stop fighting among themselves or against Israel.

This is an unfortunate truth. But recognizing it is crucial to understanding why no political solution works, and why every clever plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian or inter-Palestinian conflicts fails.

Project Syndicate

Barry Rubin is director of the Global Research in International Affairs Center, Interdisciplinary University. His latest book is "The Truth About Syria."

A litmus test

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

INSTEAD OF PEACE AND CALM AND GOOD wishes for all humankind, what reigned in the minds and hearts of Marine Park rangers, environmental NGOs, fisheries officials, Chinese poachers and a shipload of endangered fish have been these past few days tension, suspicion and fear of a possible conflict between the Philippines and China.

"A diplomatic standoff looms," writes Lory Tan of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF-Philippines). "What is clearly an environmental crime in the eyes of the world is being simplistically interpreted by a rather presumptuous diplomatic officer, backed up by some Filipino bureaucrats, as a threat to Chinese business in the Philippines."

The story behind this latest wrinkle in Fil-Sino relations began last Dec. 21 when a composite team of Marine Park rangers in the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park observed a vessel inside the marine protected area. As the rangers approached the vessel, it sped off, but after a 30-minute chase, and firing warning shots, the rangers finally caught up with the vessel, which was then escorted to a ranger station.

According to an incident report, on board the vessel Ho Wan were 30 Chinese from Hong Kong, including one woman, with travel papers for a temporary visit. Also on board were approximately 800 live fish, with an estimated 300 of them being Napoleon Wrasses, known locally as "Mameng," a protected species under the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES). Also found on the vessel were 11 sampans and a number of compressors.

Tubbataha Park manager Angelique Songco requested Navy assistance to escort the vessel to Puerto Princesa. Meanwhile, the Chinese crew insisted that they were just "passing through" the protected area. But fishery activities, which the presence of the endangered fish and equipment like compressors indicates, are among the list of acts which cannot be considered part of "innocent passage."

* * *

DESPITE the request from Tubbataha management, Vice Adm. Tirso Danga of Wescom refused to authorize the deployment of a Navy vessel to escort the Ho Wan to Puerto Princesa, claiming that no vessel in Palawan was available or serviceable.

Instead, Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap and BFAR Director Malcolm Sarmiento took responsibility for securing the Chinese vessel, with its patrol boat scheduled to leave Puerto Princesa after Christmas.

The incident turned into a diplomatic issue when an officer from the Chinese Embassy arrived in Puerto Princesa within 24 hours after the report was filed. A DFA official added to the fire by calling local officials to defend the Chinese, saying that their arrest was irregular. Tan says that in the succeeding days, "officials from the DFA called repeatedly to insist that the Ho Wan, its crew and cargo be released."

Notes Tan: "It is bad enough that our own Department of Foreign Affairs shows a bias for diplomacy over the rule of law. It makes things worse when an official of a foreign embassy takes it upon himself to directly and brazenly interfere in Philippine affairs."

Hmmm, sounds familiar?

* * *

THE LATEST word is that the DFA itself has launched a probe into this alleged intercession. "The matter is undergoing investigation with the provincial and national committee on illegal entrants ... we await the results of their investigations," DFA spokesman Ed Malaya was quoted as saying by another paper.

The Bureau of Customs has also reportedly denied issuing any permit to the Ho Wan, claiming any permit presented by the crew must be fake. Sen. Jamby Madrigal has declared her intention to call for an investigation into the manner by which agencies protect natural reserves and patrol our marine borders.

Meanwhile, according to a news report, Chinese diplomats have demanded the release of the Ho Wan and its crew, even demanding that the Navy escort the vessel out of the area. Songco also said that Nixon Edora, operations manager of South Pacific Inter-marketing Corp., which claims to be managing the Ho Wan, insists the vessel had a permit from the BFAR, a claim that Sarmiento denies. He said the BFAR has no office or representative in Tawi-tawi, where the Ho Wan had come from, and that even if it did, no government agency would issue such a permit since the "mameng" is on the list of protected species.

* * *

TEXT messages that have to do with the controversy, and relayed by Songco to supporters, also indicate the mind-set of the businessmen and investors behind this poaching in Philippine waters and trade in endangered species.

As written, the messages go: "The people in ngo just like destroy the people who live in tawi tawi. They want to control whole philippine? They say ok is ok, they say not ok is not ok, who is at their bk? Poor life in philippine."

"Gud am, the business im doing in philippine is it not good for the local people? I invest a lot of money and try my best to maintain a lot of philippine family. Is it wrong? Im very disappointed for the ngo is not think about the philippine public life. Fishmen life is hard."

"This person clearly does not understand, nor accept, Philippine laws," comments Tan. "He seems to believe that NGOs call the shots, without any legal basis. His tone seems to indicate that he believes that business is business, and should be allowed to go on whether there are laws or not. Another obvious point here is that he has been operating illegally for some time in the Philippines, having made significant investments."

We start the year with a litmus test of our government's ability to defend our sovereignty and territorial integrity, while protecting the environment and endangered species from criminal exploitation.

Words of advice

LOOKING BACK

Ambeth R. Ocampo

WHEN RABID FEMINISTS CALL FOR A REVIsion of history into "**herstory**," I wince, not because of gender, but rather for the fact that women are almost invisible in history. History is unfortunately almost always about men—great and small—because the people writing history are mostly men. If women left more historical records and if we had more women historians, then the landscape would truly be different. What would our history have been if Mrs. Lapu-lapu, Mrs. Aguinaldo or Mrs. Rizal did the writing and doing instead of keeping house?

In the last century we have seen women take more active roles in history—from Imelda Marcos to Cory Aquino to Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who may or may not want to be mentioned in the same sentence. We have seen a great deal of change, but the verdict of history comes way after our times.

What would our lives be if our mothers wrote down what advice they gave their children, or if they wrote down what they drilled into our heads as we were growing up?

One of the memorable lines of my mother, as I stared into an uneaten plate of vegetables, was, "*Ubusin mo 'yan, maraming taong nagugutom sa* India." It's not that I felt no empathy for the starving masses in India, but I answered back, "*Bakit, kung kakainin ko ito mabubusog ba sila*?"

It was a sensible and logical retort, but it drew a slap on the face and more *ampalaya* on my plate. My mother remembered that encounter simply because, to her dying day, she had no reply.

One mother who dictated her thoughts to a secretary was Pura Villanueva Kalaw (1886-1954) and these were compiled by her daughter Maria Kalaw Katigbak, former senator and censors chief, in a biography published in 1983. The words may be old, but they remain relevant to our day and quite apt after Christmas because she had sensible advice on money:

"If you want revenge on your enemy, push him into politics. You will feel fully vindicated when you see him with the headaches, problems, expenses of the politician."

"The pawnshop business is not a good business because it thrives on the misery of people."

"Renting out houses is the best business, specially for women. As soon as the sun rises in the east, your income begins. When it sets in the west, your rent is due. Your income is sure as night comes after day."

"When it is about your money, what to do with it, or where to place it, or take it, do not believe anybody but your own judgment. Remember that everyone wants your money, too, and wants to take it away from you for himself, if possible. If you are stupid, he will succeed."

"When a girl is beautiful and rich, she will be much sought-after. She will also be sought-after in marriage even if she is ugly, if she is rich. But if she is only beautiful and not rich, she will also get offers to be a *querida*. Do not be misled by men who flatter you about your beautiful face, for what they really refer to is your beautiful pocketbook. These days, that is what counts."

"Modesty gets you nowhere. It is not a virtue, but is part of your Malayan blood; you are unlike me who am part Spanish, hence more aggressive and pushy. That was the asset of Quezon, the mestizo, and the deficiency in Osmeña."

"There is no money in writing. If I had persisted in my early career as a journalist like your father [Teodoro M. Kalaw], we would both be famous but beggars today, and probably our children too. I thought it all out. Only one of us could afford to be a writer. I decided to become a businesswoman, to make money for my children."

"When I go out, I ask myself: where do I go first so I can collect some bad debts? Who owes me money most, so I can visit him? Unlike you, when you go out, you ask yourself: What sale is going on today? Where is the next bargain sale?"

"Do not expect servants to perform difficult jobs that require complicated thinking. Remember that their intelligence is low; that is why they are servants, and not masters. In fact, if they had horns, they would be carabaos."

"When your relatives come to borrow money from you, get out of the dilemma by giving them outright a small sum. Do not expect them to repay you. Think of it as your charity in their hour of need and then forget all about it. In this way you will not have enemies.

"Good health is your most important asset. You may have the best mind in the world, but if your health is bad, you will be useless, even a burden. If you are healthy you can always be useful; you can always do something to help, even if only to empty the *orinola* for your mother."

"I do not believe in jewelry as an investment. It is dead money because it does not work to produce anything. There is also the risk of losing it; hence, jewelry can be a liability. It is bought for reasons of vanity and ostentation, and not for use. It has no moral value."

Kalaw wrote the first Philippine cookbook and it seems she wrote about other things as well, even history. I want to read her writings because one of her words of wisdom could be directed at me and some constipated academics, "If some people do not agree with my version of what is history, let them write their own book. In my book, I write what is in my mind. Whoever does not like it is free to write her own book."

* * *

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu

Youthful elderly

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

WITH THE RECENT RETIREMENT OF ONE OF OUR PROfessors, I have become the oldest faculty member in our anthropology department at UP Diliman.

Hmmm. . .that announcement wasn't as difficult as I thought it'd be. No one believes me anyway at UP. Indulge me with a bit of boasting, but the other day someone came up to me in a bookstore and asked if I was the INQUIRER columnist and after I said yes, he said it was good to see a match between the photograph (look to your right) and the real person. I smiled ear to ear, thanked him and told him proudly the photograph was lifted from my UP faculty ID card, which was taken at least a decade ago, maybe even earlier.

Any secrets to share? Many, but I'm not spilling all the beans yet today. Genes help, from both my father and mother. My father lives up to his name, Julio, which means "youthful," looking about the age I am now, while my mother frets about not having enough white hair to look like the grandmother she is.

I can tell you, too, avoiding anything that claims to restore or maintain youth—from spas to health foods—gives you better odds at staying young, given all the nonsense that's being peddled these days. And avoiding stress? That's rubbish too: my department is one of the most stressful in the university but the stressful professors all look much, much (I say that with great relish) older than I do, so maybe the advice should be: stressing others can age you.

'More of'

Seriously, staying young isn't so much a function of antioxidants and avoidance of stress than meeting life head-on, armed with advice from those who've successfully made it into their 70s healthy and well-adjusted to life.

December's many reunions are always a good time to meet with them. The other night, I agreed to join my parents at a restaurant where they hosted a dinner for friends from way back, and I mean way way back to the 1950s.

I had tried to excuse myself, pleading that I was too young, when my parents first asked me to join them, but agreed in the end because all of their friends had, Asian-style, become "Uncle" and "Auntie," and some of them I had not seen for years. Yet when we finally settled in at the restaurant, I had this strong sense of déjà vu: except for the white hair and walking canes, the dinner could have been taking place in 1970. Yet, this was 2006 and no one in the group was below 80.

As I watched my parents and the uncles and aunties interacting, I thought of something an elderly Catholic sister had told me some years back, drawing from her life in the convent: "People don't really change. What you'll see is the 'more of' syndrome: people become more of what they were in their youth." How true, I thought. Whatever they were years ago—quiet or loquacious, jolly or serious—they were even more so now.

I checked with my psychologist friend, Dr. Theresa Batangan, if there were studies about personality and aging and she said yes, certainly. Psychologists say we're born with basic personality traits that we bring with us into old age, but these traits are subject to molding by society.

"Niceness" is a cluster of personality traits that have been shaped by society. Take aggression as an example. You see the differences even among infants, but that aggressive little tyke can learn, from parents and teachers, to temper that characteristic, to tap that trait in a positive way. That's the stuff that makes your human rights advocates, for example.

On the other hand, if someone's aggressiveness is not reined in and that person is able to ride into power, we see that trait channeled inwards into arrogance. Unfortunately, that arrogance can get that person places, if he's able to wheel and deal in the world of business, sometimes even in the academe. If the arrogance goes unchallenged or is even praised as a virtue, we eventually see insolence and impunity.

We reap what we sow. The ones who tame their aggressiveness will age into wonderful grandparents, spouses, colleagues, because they're always looking for ways to channel all their energy, and time, taking the initiative for productive pursuits. There won't be a lack of opportunities either, as people beg and pull them back to work.

And the "untamed" ones? It depends. If they retain the power they had in earlier years, they'll continue to live in a fantasy world believing that arrogance is good. But once they lose their power, usually usurped by a new generation of more aggressive colleagues, their social support systems crumble. Surprisingly, this does not mean they become nicer; instead, the more of syndrome still kicks in. Biologically, the neurological circuits are breaking down so whatever modicum of graciousness the untamed ones still had in mid-life will now disappear, the mean becoming meaner in old age.

'Less of'

Which takes me to the "less of" aspect of aging. We know old age is associated with neural circuits breaking down, motor coordination slowing down, the senses losing focus.

Yet I can't help thinking that "less of" isn't necessarily a loss. Nature lets go of short-term memory first while mercifully allowing even Alzheimer patients to keep some of their long-term memory, which can be amazingly vivid, and sustaining.

I love it when the elderly play deaf (in Filipino, *nagbibingibingihan*), pretending they can't hear because they don't want to hear. Despite claims to hearing loss, or vision impaired by cataracts, watch them report back to you everything your teenage children were doing, and were saying, to and with whom, while you were away.

The youthful elderly tend to come from environments where they are constantly challenged to be active, physically and mentally. Those who "mellow" are actually people whose better traits are allowed to surface in a new environment—the former big boss, that CEO now finds that uncompromising firmness doesn't work as well as a grandparent. If it's in them to be patient and kind, an infant grandchild will bring out those virtues.

The youthful elderly thrive on being sought out for advice. But do be aware of that play between the "more of " and the "less of." When I ask older people for advice and they give me a mouthful, I realize it's because they see so many options they want you to choose from. In contrast, when they just look at you and smile, you know it's their way of saying: "Spare me, I'm old now. Don't get me to endorse what you want to do. I've taught you what's right and wrong so do what you should be doing, even if it's more difficult."

When you ask someone elderly how they keep young, don't be surprised if they just smile, the silence as golden as their years.

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If rape happened in the US

I READ IN THE FINANCIAL TIMES of London that the United States is pressuring the Philippine government to release a recently convicted American rapist into US custody, otherwise the US government will withhold its military aid for the Philippines.

As an American, I can say unequivocally that had the incident—where an incoherent, drugged or drunk, sexually abused young woman was flung in a state of degrading undress on to a street filled with horrified citizen witnesses—occurred in the United States, the criminals (even if they were a group of foreign soldiers) would all be facing long prison sentences. There would be no spiritual advisers like Fr. James Reuter, no "We Love The Rapist" female fan clubs in Makati and, certainly, no overt or covert pressure from any foreign government to "go easy on the lads."

Where on earth can such things happen except, it seems, in the Philippines, where a significant sector of the population still indulges in a self-hating colonial mentality, which gives a disgusting, foreign rapist higher importance than the rights and honor of an abused local citizen?

May those multitudes of good Filipinos who uphold justice and respect human dignity demand that their government refuse to cave in to US blackmail. After all, it is more likely that the Bush administration will ultimately decide to sacrifice one dumb rapist rather than risk its strategic position in the Pacific area.

—ROBIN EASTMAN-ABAYA,
reabaya@earthlink.net

More in favor of Americans than Filipinos

I WOULD LIKE TO COMMENT ON Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez's comments regarding the cancellation of the Visiting Forces Agreement next year. He said that Judge Benjamin Pozon doesn't respect the agreements between the Philippine and US governments.

The Americans (not all of them) involved in this rape case don't even know how to respect Filipinas, so why is our secretary of (in)justice siding with them? He obviously hates Filipinos given his inclinations to favor the Americans more than the Filipinos.

I wonder how he'd feel if he were directly related to that girl who was raped.

—JENNY XAVIER,
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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
LETTERS

A lady acts like one

AS USUAL, THAT WAS A GREAT editorial in the INQUIRER's Dec. 7 issue.

In a Marlon Brando movie many years ago, one of the characters said to Vivian Leigh: "You wanted to be a lady. It's a pity you can't act like one."

If the Supreme Court is an environment of idiots, one wonders what makes the Senate an environment of. As if to preclude any doubt, three senators reportedly shook Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago's hand.

The INQUIRER editorial was a righteous indignation of the very disgraceful language and repugnant behavior so unbecoming of a senator. It was a day that will go down as a day of "infamy" in senatorial history.

—NC LIVELO,
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Escape artists in shabu raids

NEWS STORIES ABOUT LAW ENforcers raiding a shabu laboratory are not new. The Bulacan raid was only the latest. (PDI, 12/24/06)

The police raid a shabu lab and find valuable equipment (this time worth P1 billion) and materials used in making the illegal drug. After that, the usual closing remarks: the police failed to catch the criminals operating the laboratory. Ho-hum.

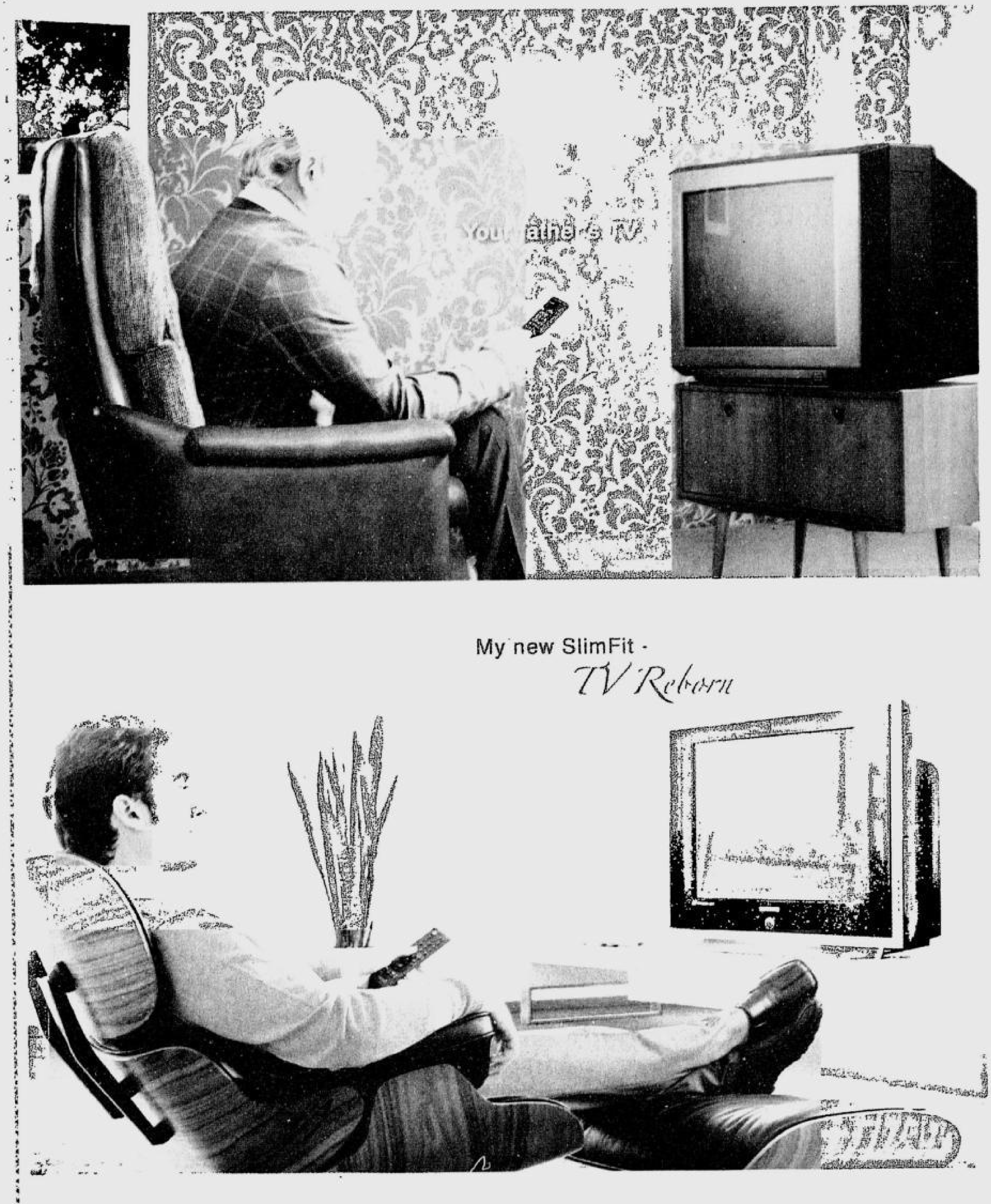
It is so amazing that the police got to know the number of Chinese (17) working in the laboratory but they could not catch a single soul. Like in past raids, the operator was able to slip the police dragnet, his or her identity remaining unknown, as usual. How could the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency have missed them when the laboratory was producing 500 kilograms to one ton of shabu?

A production as big as this (enough for the export market) is difficult to hide. Our country is known not only as poor and chaotic, but also as one of the biggest suppliers of shabu abroad. While our congressmen go to the extent of losing two nights of sleep to pursue Charter change, crime syndicates are laughing at the incompetence of our drug enforcement agencies.

What really are the priority goals of our "rip-resentatives"—to protect our country or their selfish interests? I should have not asked the question. With their dogged pursuit of Cha-cha, things are all very clear.

And within the Philippine National Police itself, isn't there anybody wondering why the police, in busting shabu operations, only get the equipment for making shabu, but never get to nab the mastermind or operator? Of course, there must be a million reasons why.

—JAMES TANAKA,
tanakajd1980@yahoo.com



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Against abusive order, not breastfeeding

WE RESPOND TO THE LETTER TITLED "FORmula makers' suit deplored." (PDI, 12/6/06)

Numerous press statements similar to the letter have been issued rebuking, with virulent viciousness, the filing of the case by the Philippine Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP) on behalf of the milk industry against Health Secretary Francisco Duque, et al. before the Supreme Court. They have also insinuated that the case is an attempt by the milk industry to bully the government into protecting PHAP's economic interest.

Initially, the milk industry chose to keep silent on the matter. But the half-truths, truncated and misleading data, misplaced judgments and the downright erroneous information being peddled to the public have constrained the industry to issue this statement.

To set the record straight, PHAP and its members support and promote breastfeeding; they fully acknowledge that breastfeeding is the gold standard in infant feeding. In fact, PHAP has poured its own resources to supplement the meager P1 million budget allotted by the government for its breastfeeding awareness campaigns.

PHAP filed the case to protect the public from the unconstitutional attempt of the Department of Health to amend the Milk Code through the promulgation of Administrative Order (AO) 2006-0012, a power which is lodged in the legislative department and clearly not within respondents' mandate. The fact that the AO went beyond the scope of the Milk Code cannot be denied. The code was promulgated to regulate the advertising/promotional thrusts and materials related to formula milk for infants (0-12 months old). The AO, however, covers "young children" (2 years old and beyond), and absolutely banned advertising, promotions or sponsorships of breast milk substitutes; the participation and involvement of manufacturers, distributors or representatives of products covered by the code in any activity on breastfeeding promotion; the participation of milk companies in policymaking entities concerned with the advancement of the government's breastfeeding program; the use of "health and nutrition claims" in advertisements for breastmilk substitutes; etc. These absolute and unqualified prohibitions are not provided in any of the provisions of the Milk Code.

PHAP is one with Garduce in appealing to both the government and the public to support efforts to ensure that safety measures, stated in the code, are in place.

We also would like to emphasize that the TRO secured by the milk industry does not in any manner deny the Filipino consumers their right to information and their right to be forewarned of the risks of formula feeding. The TRO merely seeks to prohibit the implementation of the AO.

—FELICITAS AQUINO-ARROYO,
Yorac Arroyo Chua Caedo & Coronel Law Firm

A case of unrecorded SSS contributions

IN THE DEC. 12 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR section, a Social Security Service member complained about his contributions to the SSS from 1965 to 1973 (while he was employed by a radio station) and from 1973 to 2000 (when he was with a commercial bank). He claimed that only his contributions from 1976 onward were recorded by the SSS. He said he has waited not just for 15 days (the period required by RA 6713) but for more than a year already for the SSS to reply to his complaint.

I wonder if it is just a coincidence but almost the same thing happened to me. I was employed by the First National City Bank from 1946 to 1963 and by Solidbank from 1963 to 1990 or a total of 44 years. However, my contributions for 29 months of those 44 years I was employed were not recorded by the SSS. I complained, but I too have received no reply from the SSS. I don't intend to wait for even just a year.

It is true that in the beginning, the SSS had difficulty recording by hand the contributions it had received. But after about 30 years with a building full of computers, the SSS can no longer claim that it has not yet updated its posting of contributions. Maybe, retiring employees and those already retired should inquire into the SSS records of their contributions. It could affect the computation of their pensions.

—AMADO F. CABAERO,
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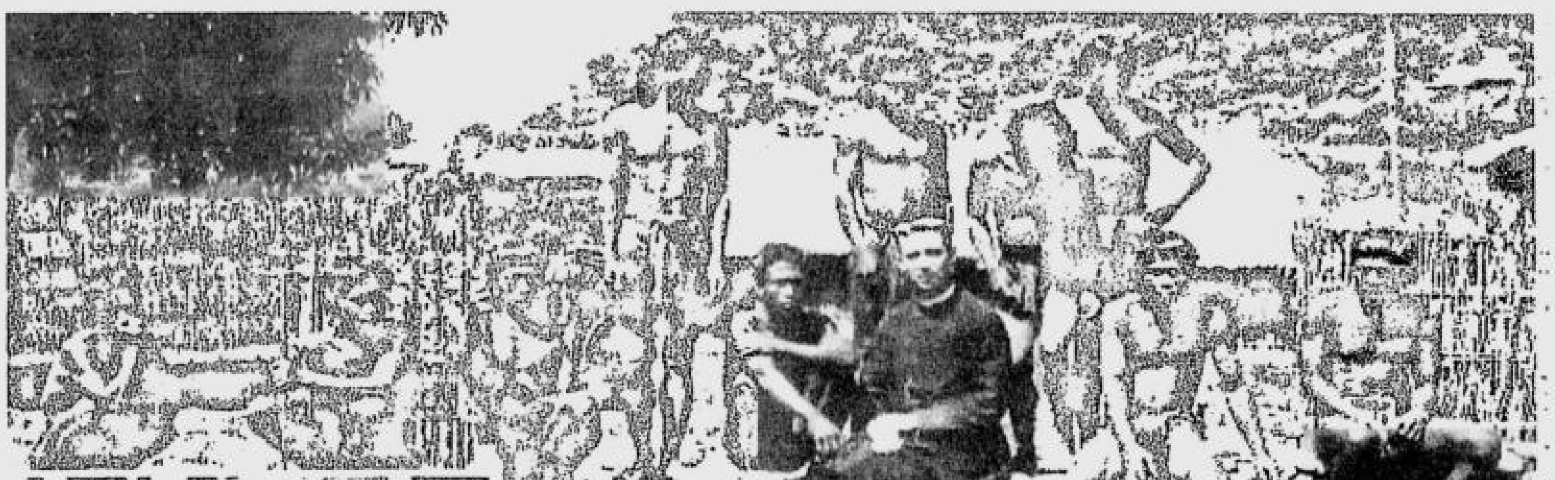
INQUIRER Northern Luzon

Editor Jun Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Rolando B. Fernandez

A century of fruitful CICM work



FR. CONSTANCE Jurgens with Bontoc warriors in 1908. PHOTO COURTESY OF CICM CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

BELGIAN priest Eugene Flameygh, a CICM historian now based in Baguio City.
VINCENT CABREZA

By Melvin Gascon *in Nueva Vizcaya*
and Vincent Cabreza *in Baguio City*

GRIM THOUGHTS SWIRLED IN the mind of Belgian missionary Fr. Jerry Bouckaert when he and his companion, Fr. Jan Anthonissen, first set foot on a village in Natonin, Mt. Province, that sunny morning in August 1970.

As young priests, they were deployed deep in the hinterlands of Mt. Province for their mandatory "immersion" to live with indigenous Filipino tribes of the Cordillera.

Lowland Filipinos of the time have feared these villagers because of stories that they practiced ritual headhunting.

As the priests were being introduced to the villagers who gathered to greet them, Bouckaert's anxiety became more palpable.

He had noticed the reddish stains splashed on the dirt road and the village grounds. He also realized that a vivid red lined the bright smiles each villager gave them.

"Could these be blood stains? Have they just eaten blood?" Bouckaert recalled asking himself.

He said it took days after their arrival when one of the local parishioners explained to them that the red stains on the ground were juice villagers spat out while chewing "momma" (betel nut).

Accounts like Bouckaert's have emboldened generations of Belgians for nearly a century to join the Philippine missions of the Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae (Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary or CICM), said retired Belgian priest Eugene Flameygh, an 86-year-old church historian now based in Baguio City.

CICM is a Roman Catholic missionary congregation founded in 1862 by Belgian priest Theophile Verbist, who heeded a Vatican mandate calling on priests to establish a Catholic foothold in Asia and Africa as Europe embarked on colonization, Flameygh said.

On Nov. 28 this year, CICM launched a yearlong countdown to its century-old presence in the Philippines in the summer capital.

CICM sent eight missionaries to the Philippines in 1907, at the end of the Spanish-American War, upon the invitation of American Catholic Bishop Dennis Dougherty of the Diocese of Nueva Segovia.

The Philippine Revolution also ignited a schism within the local church, and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente of former Catholic priest Gregorio Aglipay successfully polarized the ranks of the country's Catholic laity at the time, wrote anthropologist Carlos Medina.

Although reluctant, CICM agreed to support efforts by American missionaries to expand the Catholic reach through the northern hinterlands, Medina wrote in the unpublished book, "Stories: 1907-1970."

> CICM agreed to support efforts by American missionaries to expand the Catholic reach through the northern hinterlands

But the stories of the missionaries' unfathomable devotion—and, yes, their Philippine adventures—fired up the spirits of Belgian priests, Flameygh said.

He said the anecdotes of an uncle about Baguio and the mountain tribes compelled him and three of his brothers to visit the country in the 1950s.

"CICM and Baguio it seems to us [were] one and the same ... For people unfamiliar with the Philippines in Belgium, when they heard 'Philippines,' it's Baguio," he said.

Few of these stories are now being told, however.

So when the highest-ranking CICM members held their first centennial countdown Mass at the Saint Louis University (SLU) in Baguio, Flameygh described the event as "the end of our story."

From a record high of about 1,800 CICM members, only 999 members remain throughout the world, said Bouckaert, who is the CICM district superior for Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino.

Belgians used to dominate the CICM, but their number dwindled to 303. Fr. Guido Everaert was the last Belgian priest Flameygh had documented docking in a Philippine port in 1971.

Many of the Belgians have retired to Europe, although a few priests have lived out their days at the Home Sweet Home in Baguio, one of the first CICM facilities built in the previous century.

Of the current CICM population, only 111 members continue to supervise CICM facilities and mission houses in the Philippines, said Bouckaert.

The countdown must also confront CICM's own division, Fr. Gerardo Costa, La Union's CICM district supervisor, said during a recent press conference.

There are only 104 Filipino CICM priests left in the country. Yet, a few of them separated to forge the more nationalistic Missionaries of Jesus congregation 10 years ago, Costa said.

Flameygh said this was ironic. He said CICM's "main work" in embarking for northern Philippines "has been the creation of local clergy."

CICM established the SLU and Saint Mary's University in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, which are now two of the largest and most influential repositories of CICM archival history.

More importantly, Flameygh said, indigenous Filipinos began welcoming their own priests.

In 1940, Fr. Alberto Duggom, the first indigenous Filipino CICM member, was ordained.

Today, CICM is run by Congolese priest Edouard Tsimba, "the first CICM superior general, who is not Belgian, to be elected to the post," Flameygh said.

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PHILHEALTH CIRCULAR
No. 35 ,s-2006

TO : ALL ACCREDITED HOSPITALS AND ALL CONCERNED

SUBJECT : Revised Survey Tools and Additional Accreditation Requirements

Due to the changes in hospital licensure requirements per Administrative Order # 147 s. 2004 as amended by Administrative Order 2005-0029 of the Department of Health the Corporation has revised the survey tools for the accreditation of hospitals at all levels. Further, since licensing requirements are minimum requirements to ensure safety and quality of health care services being rendered to members of the National Health Insurance Program, the Corporation has added the following requirements for accreditation of hospitals:

I. Personnel

A. Manpower Complement

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Physicians*	2 MDs for ≤ 10 beds, one additional MD for every additional 5 beds	4 MDs for ≤ 20 beds, one additional MD for every additional 5 beds	15 MDs for ≤ 50 beds, one additional MD for every additional 3 beds; at least 3 physicians to go on 24-hour duty	15 MDs for ≤ 50 beds, one additional MD for every additional 3 beds; at least 5 physicians to go on 24-hour duty
Registered Nurses (RN)	3 RNs for ≤ 12 beds, one additional RN for every additional 6 beds		15 RNs for ≤ 50 beds, one additional RN for every additional 4 beds	
Midwife/ Nursing Aides	Optional for ≤ 24 beds; 1 for 25 beds and one additional midwife/ nursing aide for every additional 12 beds	1 midwife/nursing aide for ≤ 24 beds, one additional midwife/nursing aide for every additional 12 beds		

** No Physician should go on duty for more than 48 hours*

B. Exemptions

A Level 1 hospital may request for exemption from the minimum requirement of "two physicians" if they are located in the following areas:

1. Poor municipalities as attested by the National Statistical Coordination Board and by the National Anti-Poverty Commission;
2. Areas with security problems;
3. Hard-to-reach areas.

In such cases the hospital shall submit to the Corporation a copy of the Memorandum of Agreement with physician-reliever in case the only physician-on-duty has to leave the hospital to ensure continuous presence of a physician in the hospital at all times.

PhilHealth surveyors must verify the request of the hospital in their respective regions before action may be undertaken by the Corporation.

II. Emergency Drugs

Listed below are the required emergency drugs in the emergency room and intensive care unit of hospitals in different levels. These drugs are grouped according to their mechanism of actions.

Level 1 (ER only)	Level 2 (ER only)	Level 3 (ER and ICU)	Level 4 (ER and ICU)
a. Cardiogenic Epinephrine b. Anticonvulsant Diazepam ampule c. Anti-histamine Diphenhydramine amp d. Electrolytes D50-50 Na bicarbonate e. Bronchodilator Salbutamol Nebule f. Ca channel blocker Nifedipine	a. Cardiogenics Dopamine, Epinephrine and Dobutamine b. Nitrates Isosorbide dinitrate c. Beta-adrenergic blocker *(any of the following)* Atenolol, Metoprolol and Propanolol d. Alpha-adrenergic blocker *(any of the following)* Prazocin and Terazocin e. Anti-arrythmic agents *(any of the following)* Lidocaine, Digoxin and Amiodarone f. Diuretics g. Calcium channel blocker *(any of the following)* Nifedipine or Verapamil h. Bronchodilator Salbutamol Nebule i. Anti-histamine Diphenhydramine ampule j. Anticonvulsant Diazepam ampule k. Anticholinergic Atropine l. Electrolytes Sodium bicarbonate D50-50 m. Corticosteroid Hydrocortisone or Methylprednisolone		

III. Equipment and Instruments

I. LEVEL ONE			
Pediatric Service (if applicable)	General Obstetrics Service (if applicable)	Emergency Room	Food Service
1. Pediatric stethoscope 2. Sphygmomanometer with pediatric cuff 3. Beds with side rails 4. Nebulizer 5. Oxygen unit 6. Suction apparatus 7. Examining table 8. Pediatric ambubag	DR room equipment 1. Delivery set 2. DR table with stirrup 3. Kelly pad 4. DR light 5. Vaginal speculum set 6. Suction apparatus 7. Oxygen unit 8. Suturing set 9. Gooseneck lamp	1. Clinical weighing scale 2. EENT diagnostic set 3. Examining table with stirrup 4. Gooseneck lamp/examining light 5. Instrument table 6. Minor surgery instrument set 7. Neurological hammer 8. Oxygen unit 9. Sphygmomanometer 10. Sterilizer 11. Stethoscope 12. Suction apparatus 13. Suturing set 14. Wheelchair 15. Wheeled stretcher 16. Laryngoscope with blade (adult and pedia) 17. Endotracheal tubes 18. Ambubag (adult and pedia)	Kitchen equipment 1. Refrigerator/Freezer 2. Cooking units 3. Kitchen utensils 4. Exhaust fan 5. Osterizer or its equivalent 6. Patient tray or its equivalent

II. LEVEL TWO			
Pediatric Service		Emergency Room Service	Dietary Service
1. Pediatric stethoscope 2. Sphygmomanometer with pediatric cuff 3. Beds with side rails 4. Nebulizer 5. Oxygen unit 6. Suction apparatus 7. Examining table 8. Pediatric ambubag 9. Pediatric laryngoscopes and blades 10. Pediatric endotracheal tubes	Nursery Equipment 1. Pediatric stethoscope 2. Sphygmomanometer with neonatal cuff 3. Infant scale 4. Bassinet 5. Refrigerator or its equivalent 6. Examining light/drop light 7. Oxygen unit 8. Sterilizer 9. Suction apparatus 10. Incubator	1. Endotracheal tubes (adult and pedia) 2. Laryngoscope blade (adult and pedia)	1. Exhaust fan 2. Osterizer or its equivalent 3. Patient tray or its equivalent

III. LEVELS THREE AND FOUR		
Surgical service	Pediatric Service	Dietary Service
1. Autoclave 2. Emergency light 3. Tracheostomy set	1. Pediatric stethoscope 2. Sphygmomanometer with pediatric cuff 3. Beds with side rails 4. Nebulizer 5. Oxygen unit 6. Suction apparatus 7. Examining table 8. Pediatric ambubag 9. Pediatric laryngoscopes and blades 10. Pediatric endotracheal tubes	1. Exhaust fan 2. Osterizer or its equivalent 3. Patient tray or its equivalent

All other issuances not inconsistent with the provisions of this issuance shall remain in full force and effect.

This circular shall take effect fifteen days (15) after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

For strict implementation.

(Sgd.) **LORNA O. FAJARDO, CESO III**
Acting President and CEO

Date signed: November 28, 2006

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Palace to watch govs' Cha-cha meet

MALACAÑANG WILL ONLY WATCH AND WILL not interfere in the emergency meeting called by provincial governors on Jan. 12 to decide whether they would push for Charter change and in what mode.

Presidential adviser on political affairs Gabriel Claudio said the meeting of local government officials would help President Macapagal-Arroyo, who has initiated a new push for Charter change following the debacle of the people's initiative and constituent assembly, get the pulse of the masses on Charter change.

"The call of some governors for an 'emergency meeting' to arrive at a common position on Charter change is a matter purely internal to the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (Ulap)," said Claudio in a text message.

Claudio stressed that the "Palace was not informed nor consulted about such a meeting nor does it intend to interfere."

The Palace had previously taken a direct hand in previous Charter change undertakings such as funding the information campaign for the people's initiative early this year and hosting a caucus of congressmen in finalizing their ill-fated attempt to convene a constituent assembly sans the Senate.

Proxies

Whatever the local government officials decide in the meeting is expected to have a bearing on the Palace's stand on the issue. "We do recognize Ulap as a most significant and effective umbrella organization and forum to gauge the sentiments not only of local executives but also the constituencies and communities they represent on key national issues not the least of which is constitutional reform," Claudio said.

Ilocos Sur. Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson earlier announced that members of the League of Provinces of the Philippines have agreed to sit down on Jan. 12 and discuss the governors' stand on whether to push for Charter change and what mode should be taken. Ulap is the proxy group of all organizations of local government officials such as councilors, board members, mayors, vice mayors, vice governors, and governors.

Over the next two weeks, the governors are expected to consult extensively with their constituencies from barangay leaders, civil groups and church officials on their stand on Charter change.

Commitment

The President declared last week that Charter change remained a "platform commitment" and that she was open to any of the three means—people's initiative, constituent assembly, and constitutional convention—available to achieve this end.

But while Malacañang has decided to take a hands-off policy on the governors meeting, the President's party Kampi and its former chair, Interior and Local Government Secretary Ronaldo Puno, have reportedly started out a campaign among local executives to file with the Commission on Elections a second petition for a people's initiative in a simple and direct format calling for a unicameral congress with a presidential leadership in contrast to the original petition made by Ulap and Sigaw ng Bayan which was rejected by the Supreme Court last October.

While the first petition was ditched by the High Court, proponents of this mode argue the SC has upheld Republic Act 6735 (the Initiative and Referendum Act) as an enabling law.

SLOW CHRISTMAS

ARNOLD ALMACEN/INQUIRER VISAYAS

A girl and her grandmother wait at the doorsteps of their house in Barangay Canhawan in Nueva Valencia, Guimaras, for the arrival of the girl's father from a day of fishing at sea. Fishermen in the area have returned to their only means of livelihood following the Petron oil spill in the province.

NPA reb slain in clash in Compostela Valley

DAVAO CITY—A COMMUNIST rebel was killed when government troops and members of the New People's Army (NPA) clashed in Sitio Mahayahay, Barangay San Jose in Monkayo town, Compostela Valley yesterday morning.

The clash happened as the Communist Party of the Philippines celebrated its 38th anniversary yesterday.

The slain rebel remains unidentified but the military said he was in his early 30s.

Col. Benito de Leon, spokesperson of the military's 10th Infantry Division, said the clash came after the suspension of the government-declared ceasefire for the Christmas season.

"After the suspension, the military operations against the NPA continued and this is the result of it," De Leon said.

The military official said the operation, which lasted for more than 30 minutes, was made by personnel of the 28th IB which operates in the Compostela Valley area.

The rebels, he said, were led by one Commander Blas Buddy of the NPA's Front Committee 3 of the Southern Mindanao Regional Committee.

Last week, a top official of the NPA in Colombio town in Sultan Kudarat was killed in another military encounter in that town's Barangay Daral Blao.

Killed was Catalino Tacadao, also known as Asyo, secretary of the NPA's Far South Mindanao Region. Also killed were rebels the military only identified as Dexter and Brigol.

Meanwhile, Jorge Madlos, spokesperson of the National Democratic Front in Mindanao, told the INQUIRER in a telephone interview that the NPA in Mindanao launched about 400 offensives in five regions compared to last year's 100, taking off with about 300 firearms.

Madlos said the CPP in Mindanao has 37 fronts covering 18 provinces, 200 towns and cities, while the NPA is present in the 18 provinces on the island.

The CPP's Mindanao Commission disclosed in its annual report that some 200 soldiers, police, militiamen and bandits were killed while 130 were wounded in 2006.

But Madlos also admitted that about 30 NPA rebels were killed and 20 others were wounded this year. *Jeffrey Tupas and Grace Albasin, Inquirer Mindanao*

1,000-day countdown to centennial of Baguio City in 2009 starts

BAGUIO CITY—TEENAGERS IN feathered headbands and G-strings raised the flag at City Hall recently to mark Day One of a thousand-day countdown to the summer capital's centennial in September 2009.

The American colonial government raised Baguio from the ground up out of pastureland used by Ibaloi herdsmen, using an urban design of Chicago architect Daniel Burnham.

Baguio old-timers honored the city's forefathers with the simultaneous launching of freshly painted markers, a boat parade at Burnham Lake and the planting of centennial trees at Burnham Park.

But people must read much more into that symbolism.

Retired city architect Joseph Alabanza, chair of the 10-man centennial commission, said they have decided to celebrate Baguio's centennial as a three-year continuing advocacy for policies that would protect its American and Ibaloi heritage.

To do this, the city government has reopened talks to convince four neighboring Benguet towns to join a metropolitan tieup.

Alabanza announced at a recent press conference that the city government was reviving the proposed fusion of Baguio and La Trinidad, Itogon, Sablan and Tuba, all Benguet towns, into a BLIST metropolis.

Alabanza, a former Cordillera director of the National Economic and Development Authority, has been pushing for the project since the term of former President Fidel Ramos.

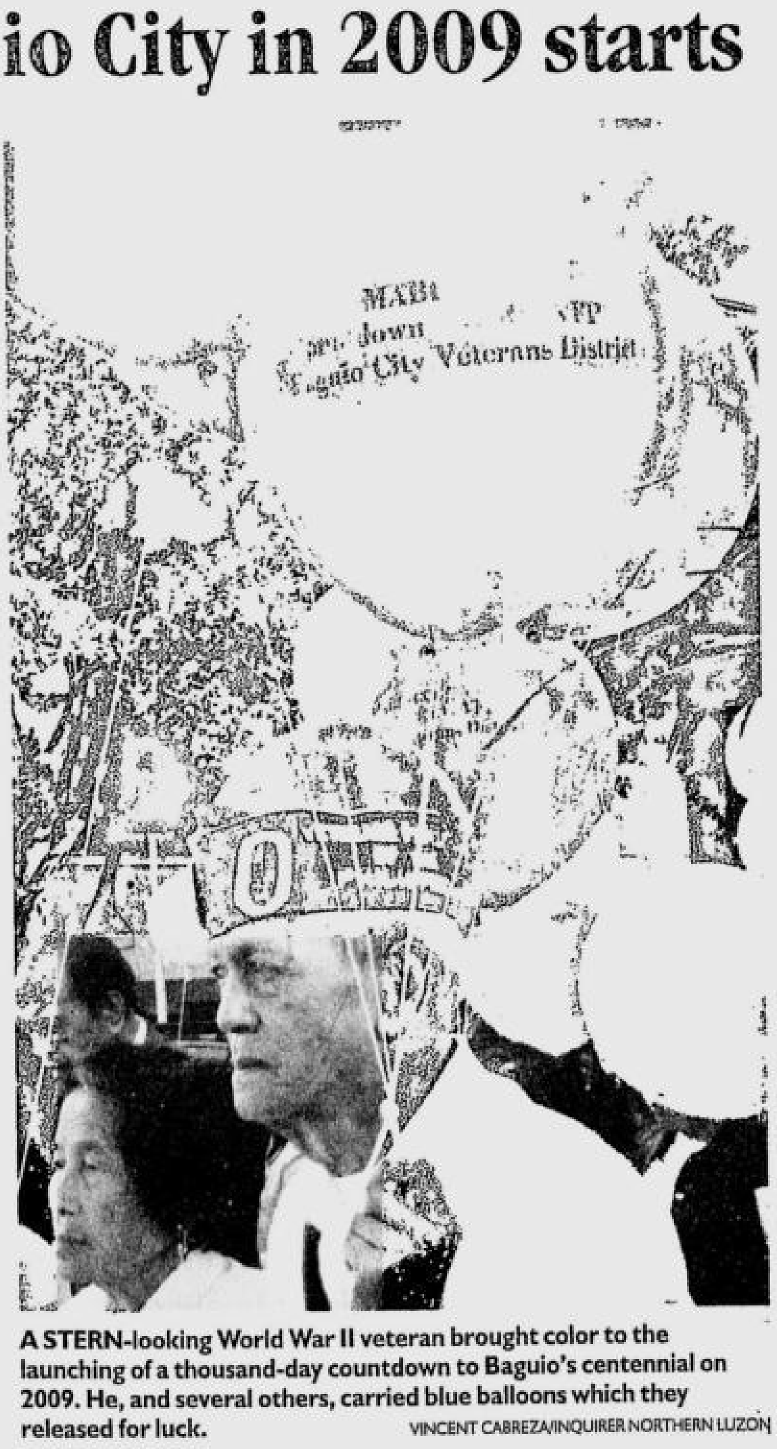
Dwindling water

The Americans designed Baguio as a sophisticated community for 30,000 residents, but the city now no longer has the carrying capacity to host future investments as evidenced by its dwindling water reserves, Alabanza said.

The city's neighbors could benefit from investments Baguio would turn away, however, he said.

European, American and Asian experts translated BLIST into actual development plans. They undertook the Baguio-Dagupan urban development project to rebuild the city after it was destroyed by a killer earthquake in July 1990.

The centennial commission will also serve as a sounding board for plans and policies to improve downtown Baguio. These include the conversion of downtown streets into pedestrian parks as well as the ban on giant billboards from the central business district "because they become (sources of) visual pollution," Alabanza said. *Vincent Cabreza, Inquirer Northern Luzon*



A STERN-looking World War II veteran brought color to the launching of a thousand-day countdown to Baguio's centennial on 2009. He, and several others, carried blue balloons which they released for luck.

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Hunt down killers of activists, CPP orders NPA rebels

From page A1

The Left has blamed the killings of activists to generals, like Jovito Palparan and Romeo Tolentino.

The military has denied having a hand in the killings, saying those killed were victims of an internal purge carried out by the communist rebels.

National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales has also been blamed by militants for the assassinations. He denied involvement in the extrajudicial killings, saying that "our campaign is to haul them to court; not kill them."

But the CPP said the Arroyo administration's "tactic is to denounce the intended victims as communists and, after they are killed, to blame the communists for killing them in a 'purge.'"

Victims

From January 2001 to Dec. 22, a total of 803 militants have fallen victim to political killings, according to the human rights watchdog Karapatan. The INQUIRER has recorded 264 victims.

About half of the victims belonged to activist groups and the Bayan Muna party. Another 206 people were abducted during the period and remained missing, Karapatan said.

Last week, Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Satur Ocampo assailed Oplan Bantay Laya II, the latest military master plan to finish off the communist insurgency before 2010.

"This is how merciless and violative the Oplan is of national and international laws. Civilians—more than 800 killed since 2001, have been targets of this so-called counterinsurgency operation plan," Ocampo said in a statement.

On Friday, Francisco Bantog, head of Bayan Muna-Sorsogon, was shot dead by three men in Donsol, Sorsogon.

Shot dead days earlier were Bayan Muna member Cris Frivaldo and Bayan Muna lawyer Gil Gojol in the towns of Irosin and Gubat.

"The successive slaying of Frivaldo, Gojol and Bantog shows the military's Oplan Bantay Laya in action in Sorsogon," said Ocampo, also the Bayan Muna president.

Spiral of violence

The London-based human rights group Amnesty International has denounced the killings of activists and warned in August that President Macapagal-Arroyo's all-out war against the rebels raises the threat of "retaliatory assassinations" by insurgents and the "prospect of a spiral of violence and abuses."

Ms Arroyo has spoken against the killings and formed a fact-finding commission to investigate them. The Melo Commission has finished its work but still has to submit its findings and recommendations to the President.

In anticipation of guerrilla attacks on the CPP's anniversary, the military declared a nationwide alert.

Maj. Gen. Jose Angel Honrado, military spokesperson, said the AFP was "ready for them."

"In fact, our target is to finish them off before 2010," he told reporters.

The government suspended military offensives against the NPA on Dec. 24 until the midnight of Dec. 25. It will suspend offensives again on Dec. 31 until the midnight of Jan. 1.

But the communist rebels, however, saw no reason for them to declare a holiday truce.

The NPA currently has 7,100 fighters and influence in 2,115 villages across the archipelago, according to military chief of staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon.

The rebels, however, say they have the equivalent of 27 battalions or about 13,500 full-time fighters with high-powered rifles, and are backed by "tens of thousands" of militias nationwide.

The CPP claims the NPA now operate in more than 120 guerrilla fronts.

In 2004, the rebels withdrew from peace talks, accusing the government of instigating their inclusion in the US and European lists of terror groups.

New cadres

The CPP also called on its forces to recruit new cadres to intensify the armed revolution.

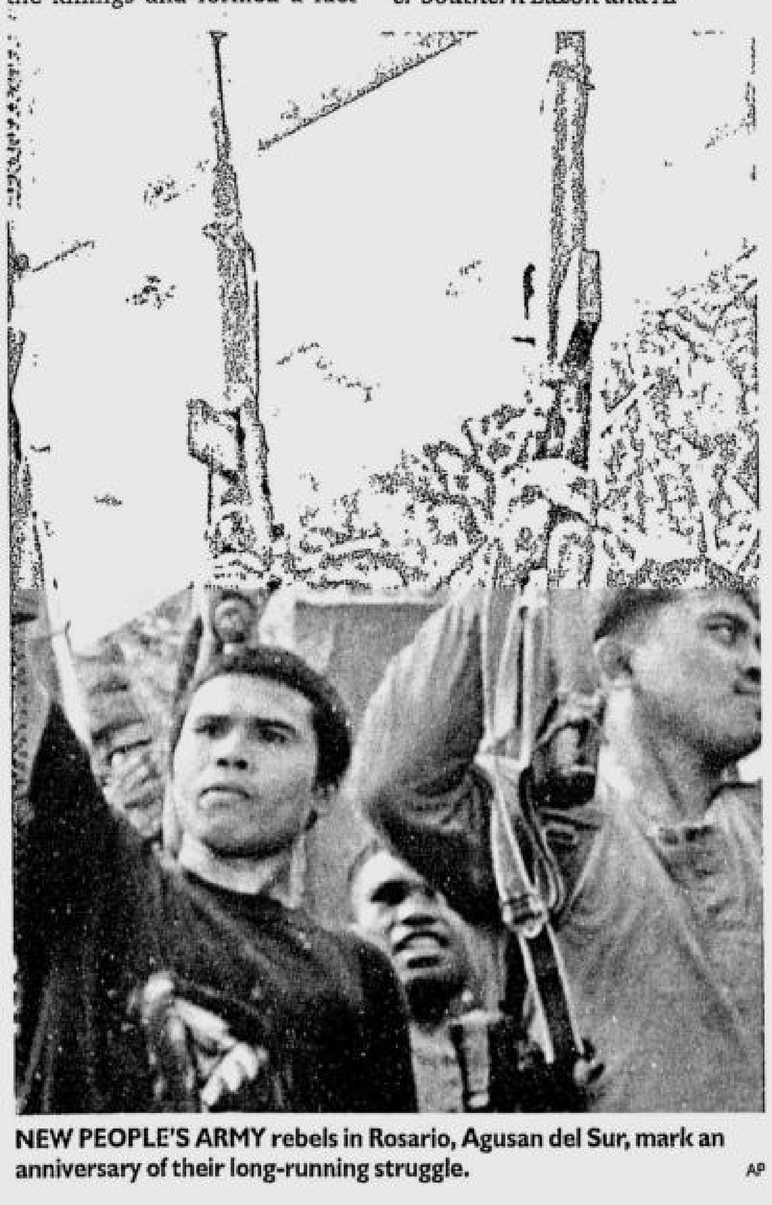
The party said more cadres and members were needed to "raise the revolutionary struggle to a new and higher level."

It urged the NPA to step up offensives against government troops and to seize more arms from the enemy in order to form more platoons and build more guerrilla fronts.

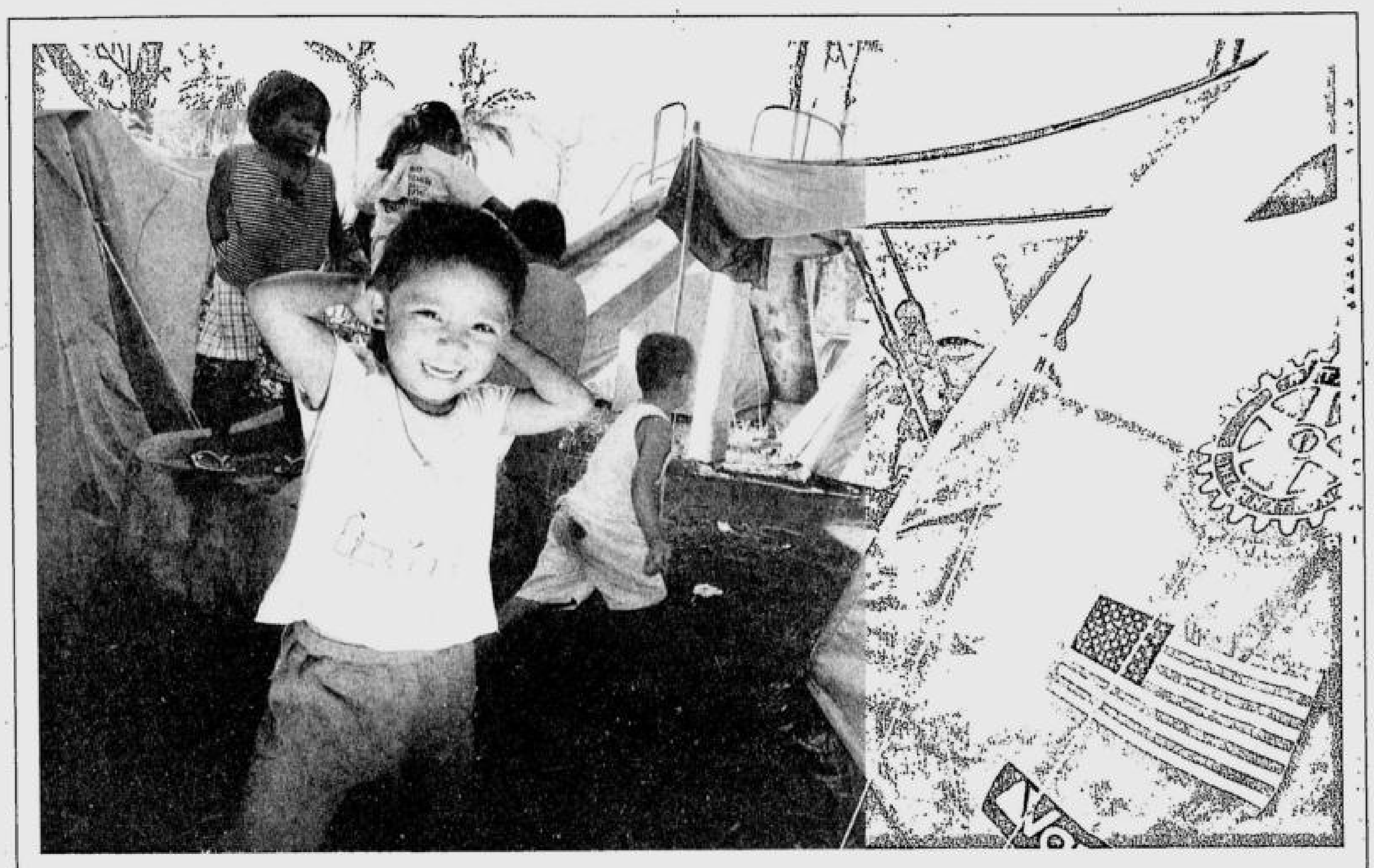
The CPP stressed the need for "a larger number of party cadres and members in order to carry out various types of work among the millions of people and raise the revolutionary struggle to a new and higher level."

"We must strive to advance from the early to the middle phase of the strategic defensive by multiplying the platoons and the guerrilla fronts, and improving command at the levels of the region and guerrilla fronts," the CPP said.

The fighting between the NPA and government forces has already claimed the lives of more than 40,000 people. *With reports from Norman Bordadora and Delfin T. Mallari Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon and AP*



NEW PEOPLE'S ARMY rebels in Rosario, Agusan del Sur, mark an anniversary of their long-running struggle. AP



KIDS WILL BE KIDS
Children rendered homeless by Supertyphoon "Reming" find room and time to play at an evacuation center in Barangay Busay in Daraga, Albay, on Christmas Day. The tents were donated by Rotary International and Shelterbox, a British charity. AFP

No RP-US war games? 'Minimal to significant losses' expected

By Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

CLARK SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE—"MINImal to significant losses" in the economies of Clark and Angeles City in Pampanga and the Subic Bay Freeport and Olongapo City in Zambales are expected as a result of the cancelation of next year's RP-US war games.

According to Philippine officials in separate assessments made yesterday, around 5,000 US troops are known to take part in the annual Balikatan exercises. These troops are distributed in the cited areas, as well as in Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, Sangley Point in Cavite, and the provinces of Palawan and Sulu, availing themselves of various services directly or through US military contractors.

Levy Laus, president and chief executive officer of Clark Development Corp. (CDC), estimated a 15-percent decline in the income of tourism-related businesses in this economic zone.

But in Manila, Malacañang is not losing sleep over the US government's cancelation of Balikatan 2007—a direct result of the custody dispute involving convicted rapist Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith.

"I don't think the United States will put at stake its close relations with the Philippines just for a rape case," said National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales.

"It's only a setback as far as our defense agreement is concerned, but it has nothing to do with the United States being unhappy with the Philippines," he said.

Down the drain

CDC's Laus could not immediately cite in peso terms the projected lost income, but sources in the business community said Holiday Inn hotel alone stood to lose reservations for 60 rooms as a result of the scrapping of the 15-day joint military exercises.

Holiday Inn's daily rates for rooms amount to more than P4,000, and for villas, about P10,000.

Montevista and Fontana are also known to rent out their rooms and villas to US troops.

While landing fees for US military aircraft are waived at the Diosdado Macapagal International Airport in Pampanga, CDC's share of the royalties from the fuel contractor Lubewell will go down the drain, said Victor Jose Luciano, president of Clark International Airport Corp.

Some 20 restaurants, 15 duty-free stores and about 100 traders of souvenir items are also sure to feel the pinch.

"The impact will be significant," Luciano told the INQUIRER.

Said Laus: "It is unfortunate that the Balikatan will be suspended."

Capt. Burrell Parmer, spokesperson of the US Marines, had earlier said each American soldier spent an average of $50 (P2,469) daily on food and drinks.

But Angeles Mayor Carmelo Lazatin said his city just outside the former US air base at Clark would bear "very minimal and insignificant losses" because only between 25 and 50 servicemen went "off base" nightly.

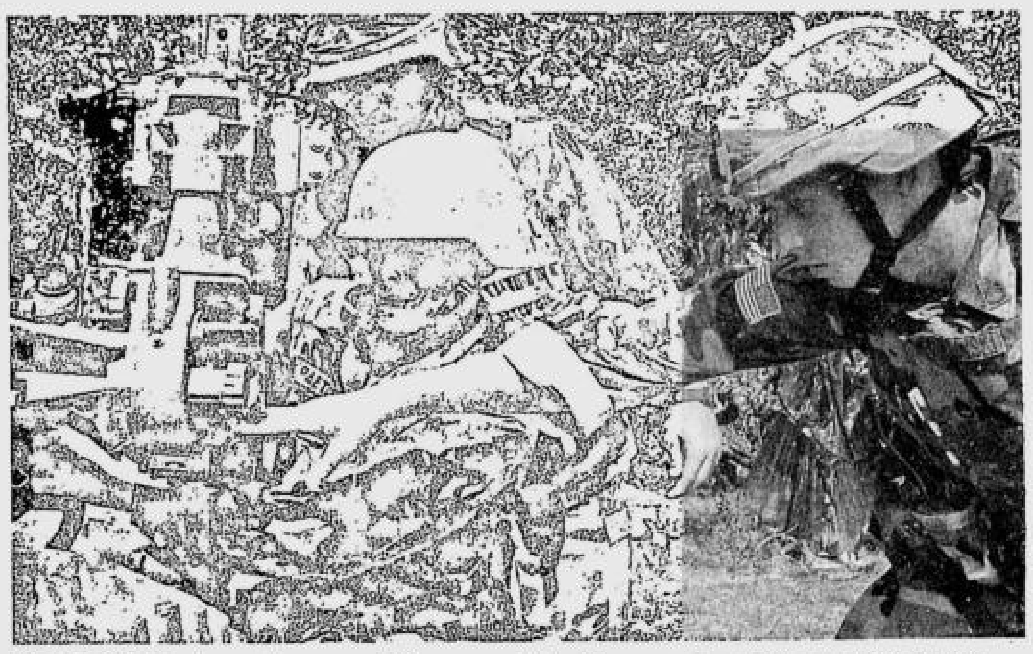
"Most of them stay inside Clark," Lazatin said, adding that the 5,000 tourists who flocked to the city daily were mostly Europeans and Asians.

R and R

But on Fields Avenue, Angeles' red-light district, a bar owner said Lazatin could be underestimating the consequences.

"The girls won't get customers," the bar owner said, referring to the practice of "rest and recreation" contractors of transporting sex workers in vans and taking them to the US servicemen's quarters in Clark.

(But many soldiers, traveling in groups of five and secured by the local police and military, are known to prefer savoring the local cuisine in restaurants declared "relatively safe from terror threats.")



US MARINES take part in an amphibious assault training exercise at Dingalan Bay, Aurora, under Balikatan 2004. PDI PHOTO

Feliciano Salonga, chair of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority, said the tourism sector at the free port would likely feel the brunt of lost income.

"Just in one day, we calculated [the soldiers'] expenditures at between P2 million and P3 million on food, souvenir items and hotel use," Salonga said.

He said this was enough compensation for the docking fees waived for US warships that arrive at Subic's Alava Pier.

"*Malaki ang mawawala* (The losses will be big)," Salonga said.

In Olongapo, a van driver said around 100 others like himself stood to lose transport contracts.

He said the US military usually paid P1,800 for a day's use of a van.

Like Salonga, Olongapo Mayor James Gordon Jr. said he expected the economic loss to be great.

Gordon said that during the last Balikatan exercise when US personnel were first allowed to spend "liberty" in the city, they spent P3 million a day, with each soldier spending an average of $30 (P1,481).

In Fort Magsaysay, military commanders said about 30 stores and 50 vendors of souvenir items expect a slump in sales.

But not everyone is unhappy.

Alma Bulawan, executive director of the women's group Buklod in Olongapo, said the cancelation of the Balikatan would spare bar workers in the city from sexual exploitation.

Calibrated response

In a phone interview, Gonzales said the US government had so far been very calibrated in its response to Smith's continuing incarceration at the Makati City Jail.

He said the US government had been limiting its responses to matters that pertain to the RP-US Visiting Force Agreement, such as the war games scheduled in February.

"The US is just forced ... to [cancel the Balikatan] because it involves the VFA. That VFA is what they can only touch, and the failure to transfer Smith [to the custody of the US Embassy] is part of the VFA. If [the agreement is] not honored, they have no choice but to suspend all activities [involving the VFA], such as the Balikatan," he said.

Gonzales said the US government might also hold back military aid to the Philippines while the legal dispute over Smith's custody case raged.

But he downplayed the impact of this factor on the overall ties between the two countries, saying the US government had "sent very minimal military aid" to the country since the Philippine Senate voted in 1991 not to renew the tenure of the American military bases in Clark and Subic.

Since Dec. 4

Since his incarceration at the Makati jail on Dec. 4, the day he was convicted by Judge Benjamin Pozon of raping a Filipino woman, Smith through his lawyers had been asking the courts to return him to US custody pending completion of the appeals process.

In backing his request, the US Embassy, with the Philippine justice and foreign affairs departments concurring, has cited the legal protection provision in the VFA.

Shortly after the cancelation of the Balikatan was announced, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said he hoped that there would be a quick resolution of the custody case, and that the Court of Appeals would consider the country's "international commitment" under the VFA. *With a report from Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. in Manila*

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Once needy Pinoy family now givers, not recipients

BURBANK, CALIF.—IN THE 20 YEARS William Arthur's students have gathered boxes of food and toys to help needy families through Burbank's Holiday Basket program, they never met the people they helped—until now.

The Washington Elementary School fifth-graders recently found themselves face to face with Sarah Quiambao, a 38-year-old mother of three. As tears welled up in her eyes, she stood in front of the class and told the children how much joy the efforts of kids just like them brought her family at a time of great need.

"I was so touched by the children's gesture that I wanted to share my story," Quiambao said.

Living day by day

It began in 2000, when she emigrated from the Philippines with her two sons, Tristan and Van Niccolo, to join her husband, Troy.

An architect in the Philippines, Troy Quiambao pursued a design career in the United States. Once his family arrived, immigration processing fees and bills mounted. Those early days were tough. Soon after her arrival, Quiambao became pregnant with her daughter, Tarra Isabella, now 5.

"At first, it was like trying to make ends meet," Quiambao said. "Living day by day."

That same year, the Quiambaos became enrolled in the Holiday Basket program, a citywide effort since 1946 to aid lower-income families. It's organized by the Burbank Coordinating Council with support from city departments, churches, businesses, school PTAs and students like Arthur's.

"We were just building our lives here," Quiambao said. "And there were these wonderful people that tried to give something special for some people that they didn't know."

Quiambao said her children were ecstatic when they received their toy truck, coloring set and artist's easel, asking her over and over again, "Where did the gifts come from?"

American dream

Six years later, the Quiambaos are thriving. They own two homes and are living the American dream. Although times are good, they haven't forgotten their first Christmas in the United States and the kindness of strangers.

When the opportunity arose for Sarah Quiambao to once again participate in the Holiday Basket program—this time as a volunteer helping others—she signed up immediately and got her children involved in gathering food.

"I know how it feels," Quiambao said. "We're so blessed that now we're able to help somebody."

Burbank Coordinating Council member Patricia Gunn, the program's chair for 14 years, said this year's effort helped more than 2,000 people, and that stories such as Quiambao's are more common than people might think.

"I can only tell you what (volunteers) have said to me," Gunn said. "They say, 'You know why I do this? Because I was a recipient at one time.'"

Gift from the heart

Arthur's students participate because he wants them to truly appreciate and take pride in the gift of giving, from gathering the food, decorating the boxes and selecting the toys to writing a parody version of "The 12 Days of Christmas," full of food-inspired lyrics—"five onion rings!"

At an annual presentation, the children hand over boxes of food and toys and sing their song for PTA volunteers. This year, Quiambao was part of that group. One by one, the volunteers thanked the children, until it was Quiambao's turn to speak.

As the children listened intently, she told them about the power of their work and the greatest gift any family could ever hope to receive—one given from the heart. *New York Times News Service*

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Nokia 6233 (3G)	9,300	6,300	2,600	FREE	FREE	FREE
Nokia 6288 (3G)	11,200	8,200	4,500	FREE	FREE	FREE
Nokia E61 (3G)	16,400	13,400	9,700	4,700	FREE	FREE
Nokia N70 (3G)	13,000	10,000	6,300	1,300	FREE	FREE
Nokia N73 (3G)	21,200	18,200	14,500	9,500	4,100	FREE
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CARNIVAL rides operations in Marikina City have been suspended following an accident on the popular octopus ride (shown in photo) on Christmas Day. EDSON C. TANDOC JR.

Deadly carnival ride

1 dead, 6 hurt as cart device fails

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

A FESTIVE DAY ENDED IN tragedy after four carts fell off a carnival ride, killing a 10-year-old girl and injuring six other children in Marikina City on Christmas Day.

The four carts of the octopus ride in a small carnival at the Marikina Riverpark in Barangay Jesus de la Peña crashed to the ground after the metal rotator holding them broke, initial investigation showed.

Mayor Marides Fernando quickly suspended the operation of all six carnivals operating in the city for the holiday season to give way to an investigation and inspection of all the rides. The operators of the ride are now detained at the city police station while the registered owner is still at large, police said.

The fatality was identified as Katherine Diana Picandal. She and her two elder sisters got on the ride without their parents' consent, their father Greg told reporters.

Picandal said he and his wife Geraldine took eight of their nine children from their house in Cainta, Rizal to the riverpark on Monday afternoon to see the bazaars.

"They told me they would just buy gifts so I allowed them to go. The next time I looked for them, they were already on the ride," he said. Katherine first got on a cart with her elder sister Kristine. They got off later, but when it was her eldest sister Kimberly's turn, Katherine again went up to join her.

Picandal said he heard a loud thud; then, people started rushing to the octopus ride. "I saw my two daughters on the ground. The cart they were on was one of the carts which fell, " he added.

Katherine died while undergoing treatment at the Amang Medical Center yesterday. Fernando said doctors told her the girl's liver had been crushed, possibly because of the impact which pinned her frail body against the cart's metal frame.

Kimberly, on the other hand, remained in serious condition and is now confined at Medical City.

The other victims who sustained bruises and wounds were identified as Dianalyn Reyes, 12; Robin Tamayo, 15 and his brother Rudy, 10; Raymond Abagon, 17; and his brother Ronald, 15.

Fernando said the ride had all the necessary permits. But she has already ordered an investigation not only of the operators of the ride, but also the offices which should have inspected the ride.

Greet 2007 with a bang, but it pays to be careful

By Tina G. Santos

FOR MANY FILIPINOS, WELCOMing the New Year would not be complete without a loud and colorful fireworks display. As a result, many merrymakers end up victims of firecracker injuries.

To lessen the number of firecracker blast victims in Manila this year, the city police force will launch an intensified information drive on the safe and proper way of handling fireworks.

For Senior Supt. Danilo Abarzosa, Manila Police District (MPD) acting director, however, the best way of greeting the New Year is by using noisemakers like paper horns or banging on pots and pans.

Abarzosa reminded the public that innocent children have lost their limbs, even their lives, because of firecrackers.

He urged residents to report the presence of banned firecrackers to avoid injuries during New Year's Eve.

Among the banned firecrackers are *pla-pla, lolo thunder* and *super lolo*.

Abarsoza said those buying firecrackers should check the labels for the explosive chemicals content of the product, the directions on how to use these safely, and the name and address of the manufacturer.

He, however, admitted that there is no law that penalizes those who use the *boga*— an improvised cannon fashioned out of PVC pipe which is considered a best seller today.

The *boga* sets off a loud explosion when the user squirts denatured alcohol at the tail end of the pipe and then lights up the mixture with a cigarette lighter or a gas stove igniter that can be activated at the click of a triggering mechanism.

"Perhaps we could just remind the children on its proper use to prevent accidents and casualties," Abarzosa said.

He also gave other tips for the safe celebration of the coming year:

- Do not light fireworks near persons, buildings or combustible objects.
- Any firecracker that does not go off after it is lit should be immediately and properly disposed of.
- All fireworks should be stored in a safe place.
- Keep fireworks such as sparklers, Roman candles and *watusi* (another type of firecracker) out of children's reach.
- Avoid holding a firecracker while you are lighting it. Attach the lighting device (a match stick or cigarette) to a stick or pole instead.
- Do not throw firecrackers at people, passing vehicles and combustible materials.
- Do not light firecrackers inside containers which can explode and produce splinters or shrapnel.
- Just as important, as with driving, if you are drinking liquor, keep away from firecrackers.

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Japanese man dies in fall from Makati condo

POLICE are investigating the cause of the death of a Japanese national whose body was found near the pool area of one of the Rockwell condominiums in Makati City. Investigators are looking at the possibility that the man, who lived on the 25th floor of the 41-story Manansala building, could have jumped to his death. REM ZAMORA

By Tarra V. Quismundo

A WATCHMAN OF THE Manansala Building in Makati City's upscale Rockwell Center was startled by a loud thud coming from the seventh floor at 9:38 a.m. yesterday.

When he checked the area, he saw the lifeless body of a man lying near the pool area on the seventh floor. The man was identified as Kasuyuki Ito, a Japanese citizen, around 30 to 35 years old. He lived on the 25th floor of the 41-story building and reportedly worked for the Japanese Embassy, police said.

"We are looking at suicide right now. He lived by himself in the condominium but we don't know yet if there was anyone else in the room when it happened," Supt. Gilbert Cruz, Makati police chief, told the INQUIRER.

Cruz said initial data gathered at the site of the incident indicated that Ito may have leapt from his unit as it was only one which had its window open.

He added that the area where Ito may have jumped from was so small it had no room for another person.

"His window was the only one open. He may have just hung from the ledge and let go, because there was really not that much space there," Cruz said.

According to the police, at 9:18 a.m., just 20 minutes before his body was found on the seventh floor, Ito called up his driver Sammy Celestino, who was then waiting at the ground floor.

Ito instructed Celestino to get ready because he would be picking up something, although he did not say what it was, Cruz said.

"He didn't know he (driver) was going to pick up the body of his employer," he added.

Cruz said Ito had been in the country for about a year.

Cop killer known to victim?

By Margaux C. Ortiz

THE FORMER MANILA POLICEman who was shot to death last Friday may have known one of his assailants, according to an official of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI).

NBI Deputy Director for Regional Operations Services Reynaldo Esmeralda said two witnesses disclosed that the victim, Edgardo Castro, had argued with one of the suspects at the parking lot of the Harrison Plaza mall in Malate, Manila before he was shot dead.

The witnesses said Armando Landar, Castro's alleged companion, tried to mediate when the former policeman and the suspect began arguing heatedly. "Suddenly, a second suspect entered the scene and shot Castro and Landar in the head," Esmeralda said.

Castro died on the spot while Landar was declared dead on arrival at the Ospital ng Maynila.

Witnesses saw the first suspect shoot Castro in the back and fled with his companion on board an unidentified sedan-type vehicle.

In an earlier interview, Esmeralda said he may have seen the gunman before the incident at the coffee shop of the nearby Century Park Hotel.

The NBI official, who was having lunch that day at the coffee shop, said he had seen a man wearing an orange baseball cap. The man seemed to be looking for someone at the smoking area. Esmeralda said Castro usually sat in the smoking area whenever he met with colleagues.

The NBI official has requested for copies of the hotel's close-circuit television footages that could show the suspect.

Esmeralda said they would ask the witnesses, one of them a parking boy who asked for a Christmas tip from the gunman, for help in identifying the suspect.

Initial information gathered by the NBI showed that Castro had worked at the controversial Presidential Anti-Illegal Recruitment Task Force (PAIRTF) headed by former Philippine Overseas Employment Administration director Reynaldo Jaylo.

Castro was also detailed at the NBI as a special investigator when it was headed by Alfredo Lim who is now a senator, Esmeralda said.

Shooting, stabbing cases spoil Yule mood

By Jocelyn R. Uy

THE HOLIDAYS USUALLY BRING out the best in people, but this was not the case in certain areas of south Metro on Christmas Day.

Records from the Southern Police District's Tactical Operations Center showed that at least four people were killed while two were hurt in separate shooting and stabbing incidents on Dec. 25.

The first incident took place at midnight at the Centennial Village in Taguig City, where three brothers who ganged up on R-Jay Baladeng stabbed him for no apparent reason. The suspects were identified as Rudy and Mark Abancio and Celando San Juan.

Baladeng was rushed to the Ospital ng Makati where he received treatment for a stab wound in the stomach.

Three hours later, a 13-year-old high school student was stabbed to death by still unidentified suspects inside his father's jeep. Based on initial investigation, Jonathan Cielos was just about to sleep inside the vehicle when the suspect, who was in the driver's seat, attacked him.

Cielos sustained a stab wound in his chest. He was brought to the Pasay City General Hospital, where he was declared dead upon arrival.

A 21-year-old man was also stabbed dead by a neighbor as he was partying with his family in Barangay Cupang, Muntinlupa City. SPO1 Rey Quizon identified the victim as Joel Gagarin. Police are still looking for the suspect, Archie Abelili, who quickly ran away after the incident, Quizon said.

Meanwhile, a drinking spree turned deadly on Pildira II in Pasay City at around 8 p.m. on Christmas Day after several gun-toting men attacked Ronald Britanico and his friend Sherwin Parenas.

The two groups threw stones at each other but one of the suspects, only identified as Russel, drew out his gun and began shooting at the victims. Britanico was killed while Parenas was injured.

An hour later, a policemen, identified as PO2 Arnel Pesigan allegedly went berserk and began firing at a group of men drinking inside the NBP Reservation Area in Muntinlupa City. A man identified as Alfredo Nicolas was hit in the face and died on the spot.

METROBRIEFS

Man shoots uncle

A FAMILY reunion turned tragic when a man shot and seriously injured his uncle in front of their other relatives on Christmas Day in Caloocan City. The police identified the suspect as Joy Cleofas, 27. He reportedly shot his uncle, Ernesto Cleofas, 45, because he blamed him for his girlfriend's arrest. According to the police, the younger Cleofas suspected his uncle of informing the police about his girlfriend's alleged involvement in drugs. Ernesto sustained a gunshot wound in his left thigh and was taken to a hospital for treatment. Police were still looking for the suspect who fled after the incident.

Nancy C. Carvajal

Fire and be fired

FIRE and be fired. This was the warning of Senior Supt. Danilo Abarzosa, acting chief of the Manila Police District, to his men in case they fire their guns during the New Year's Eve celebration. Abarzosa yesterday led police station commanders in Manila in taping the muzzle of their men's firearms to prevent its owners from using them. The officials also signed the tape to ensure that no one would try to replace it. The move, Abarzosa said, would ensure that policemen would not violate the Philippine National Police order prohibiting indiscriminate firing. In the past, many people, including children, were killed or hurt by stray bullets fired during the holidays. Abarzosa also urged the public to report immediately people who indiscriminately fire a gun, whether they are policemen or civilians.

Tina G. Santos

Facelift for Taguig lakeshore

By Jocelyn R. Uy

THE LAKESHORE TOWNS IN Taguig City will soon be restored to their old glory as preparations for their launching as one of the premier tourist destinations in the metropolis are now underway.

The local government has signed a memorandum of agreement with the Laguna Lake Development Authority for the joint development of the historic Laguna de Bay shoreline running from Barangay Napindan—home of the legendary lighthouse—to Barangay Bagumbayan.

The MOA calls for the establishment, ownership and operation of a joint venture corporation which would declare, promote and develop Taguig's lakeshore as a business, commercial and tourism development zone to boost the city economy and provide employment and business opportunities to residents.

The city's public information office said the "Lakeshore District" would be patterned after a resort—featuring a marina, a boardwalk, a floating grandstand, ferry terminal, a fish port and a multi-modal transit, among others.

Back in the early '70s, Barangay Napindan's shoreline was the favorite destination of many locals, among them celebrities, for picnics. They swam in the once clear waters of Laguna de Bay or played around the 17th-century lighthouse which stands guard at the lake, near the mouth of the Pasig River and the Napindan Channel.

In a previous interview with Lilia Mozo, an old resident of Napindan who is the barangay secretary, she told the INQUIRER that many residents have been waiting for the local government to act on its plans to restore the beauty of their hometown.

But the wait is over. Ana Santos, chief of the public information office, told the INQUIRER yesterday that residents could expect work on the project to begin early next year.

Mayor Freddie Tinga had come up with the idea of reviving the "Old Town" district of Taguig after he won the mayoralty in 2004. Santos added that the local government would be spending a "huge amount of money" to finance the project.

DID YOU KNOW

FROM 2001 to 2005, a total of 46,719 fires were recorded nationwide. Almost half of these (20,558) occurred in Metro Manila, followed by Southern Tagalog, which had the second most number of fires at 4,971. On the other hand, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao had the least number of fire incidents at 192.

Cyril L. Bonabente, Inquirer Research

Suspects tagged in mall robbery

By DJ Yap

AT LEAST THREE SUSPECTS IN THE Christmas Day heist at the Ever Gotesco mall in Quezon City have been identified, but the police refused to name them to avoid jeopardizing follow-up operations.

"They are members of a syndicate known to stage large-scale armed robberies in commercial establishments around Metro Manila," said Senior Supt. Magtanggol Gatdula, director of the Quezon City Police District.

He added that the suspects, who were listed in the police's "rogue gallery," matched the descriptions provided by watchmen posted at the mall.

Secrecy

But he declined to identify the suspects, citing the need for secrecy to allow investigators to monitor the group unhampered.

On Monday, about nine heavily armed robbers in fake Special Weapons And Tactics uniforms went inside the mall on Commonwealth Avenue at past 1 a.m., saying they were responding to a threat in the building.

They disarmed and hogtied the guards and entered the treasury office on the second floor, where they opened and emptied a vault containing the mall's weekend sales and the employees' payroll.

Police did not say how much was taken, but said it could run to millions of pesos.

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Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 4934 Series of 2006

Ethiopia fighter jets strafe Mogadishu airports

NAIROBI, KENYA—AN ETHIOPIAN fighter jet strafed Mogadishu's airport on Monday in a striking show of force that took the growing conflict in the Horn of Africa to Somalia's capital for the first time.

Across the country, Somalia's Islamist leaders conceded that they were rapidly losing territory to the forces of Somalia's internationally recognized transitional government.

In Beledweyne, a town near the Ethiopian border, residents resumed the lives they had led before Islamist rule, not even a day after the Islamist forces pulled out. A truck hauling chat, a mildly narcotic leaf that the Islamists had outlawed, pulled into the market to a burst of cheers.

"It was wonderful to see that truck," said Farah Abdi Dereer, a vendor of spare parts.

The fighting between Somalia's transitional government and the country's powerful Islamist movement, based in Mogadishu, has been raging on and off for nearly a week.

On Sunday, Ethiopia officially joined the hostilities, with the tacit blessings of the United States, bombing Islamist positions in several frontline areas and pushing ground troops deep into Somali territory. Ethiopian officials said they sided with the transitional government because the Islamists, whom American officials have accused of harboring Qaida terrorists, posed a threat to the region.

On Monday, witnesses in Mogadishu said that a lone Ethiopian fighter jet roared over the Indian Ocean around 9 a.m., fired machine guns at the parking lot of the international airport, which was mostly empty, and banked sharply away.

The attack was apparently meant to be more a demonstration of military might than a destructive mission; the only reported casualty was an airport janitor who was slightly injured. It did, however, have the intended effect of shutting the airport down as Daallo Airlines, one of the last carriers to fly into Somalia, promptly canceled all service.

Witnesses said four more Ethiopian fighter planes then attacked a second, intensely guarded military airport west of Mogadishu, where the Islamist forces stored their heavy weapons and ammunition.

Ethiopian officials said they were following specific instructions by the transitional government to seal Somalia's borders to bar foreign fighters. According to UN officials, the Islamists are supported by several thousand Eritreans, Libyans, Syrians and Yemenis who have responded to the call of a holy war against Ethiopia, a Christian-led country. *NYT*

Cuba awaits diagnosis on Castro

HAVANA—CUBA WAS ON TENterhooks Monday over Fidel Castro's fragile health, as residents of the Communist island awaited a visiting Spanish doctor's diagnosis on whether additional surgery is needed.

Officials in Madrid confirmed Monday that a Spanish surgeon had been dispatched to Cuba to treat Castro, 80, who has not been seen in public for five months. Few medical updates have been made public since his reported intestinal surgery.

"The Cuban government decided to ask one of our top professionals to care for its president," Manuel Lamela, health councilor for Madrid's regional government, told reporters.

"When a government asks for help or collaboration, health officials respond," Lamedo added, appearing to confirm a Spanish newspaper report, which identified the physician as Jose Luis Garcia Sabrido, head of surgery at Madrid's Gregorio Maranon hospital.

Separately, Spain's Cadena Ser radio described Garcia as a well-known specialist in digestive problems.

Castro's brother, interim leader Raul Castro, has said the Cuban leader's recovery continues apace, but his continued absence from the public eye has fueled widespread speculation that he may be seriously ill and perhaps even near death.

US Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte told the newspaper The Washington Post earlier this month that Castro was likely to survive "months, not years."

News reports late last week said the Cuban leader was too ill to receive his friend, Nobel Prize-winning Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who was on the island for nearly a month. *AFP*

THE DOG, THE CAT AND THE MOUSE ATOP THE CAT
Greg Pike's dog Booger, cat Kitty and white mouse Mousie, rest at the end of a day in Bisbee, Arizona, Dec. 24. REUTERS

Japan woman who blasted neighbor with music jailed

TOKYO—A JAPANESE WOMAN CHARGED with inflicting injury on her neighbor by blasting rock music at her house for more than two years was given a 20-month prison term Tuesday, a court official said.

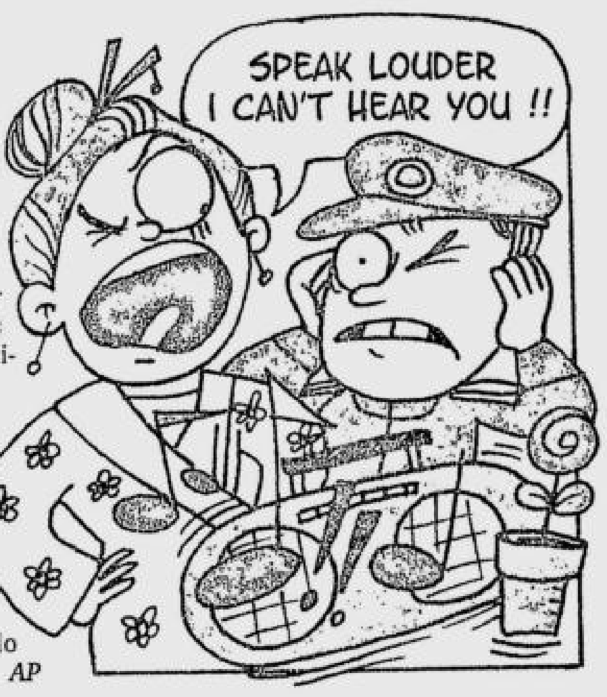
Miyoko Kawahara, 59, was sentenced by the Osaka High Court, revoking an initial ruling that had given her a one-year prison term, court spokesperson Takanao Kawasaki said.

Kawahara in Heguri, Nara Prefecture (state) in western Japan, was accused of causing insomnia and headaches to her next-door neighbor by playing loud dance music almost 24 hours a day on a portable stereo she had pointed at her neighbor's house, six meters away.

She was arrested on April 11, 2005. The two women had had a number of disagreements that police did not elaborate on.

"The defendant ignored calls by local authorities and continuously played music at a high volume for some 29 months," Kyodo News agency quoted presiding Judge Hiroshi Furukawa as telling the court.

In handing down a longer prison term than a local court ruling in April, this year, Furukawa told the court that the defendant "still maintains a hostile attitude toward the victim and it is highly likely she will commit the crime again," Kyodo said. *AP*



Israel orders easing of Palestinian restrictions

JERUSALEM—ISRAELI PRIME Minister Ehud Olmert ordered Monday an "immediate easing of restrictions" on Palestinians, including the removal of dozens of roadblocks across the occupied West Bank.

"The prime minister ordered the immediate easing of restrictions on the Palestinian population in order to strengthen the moderate elements and in accordance with the agreements reached during his meeting with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas" on Saturday, his office said in a statement.

Olmert gave the green light for the measures following a four-hour meeting with Defense Minister Amir Peretz and the heads of the defense establishment, who drew up a plan under which "a series of easing measure will be given to the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza."

Several "immediate" steps will be taken, including the easing of traffic of goods into the Palestinian territories and issuing more entry permits into Israel, the statement said.

Speaking earlier before the parliament's powerful foreign affairs and defense committee, Peretz said that Israel would dismantle 59 barricades and roadblocks in the West Bank in two phases—24 at first, and the rest later.

Palestinians traveling across the West Bank are forced daily to go through dozens of checkpoints erected by the Israeli army in a bid to keep out militants.

The announced measures are seen as an attempt by Israel to bolster Abbas and his Fatah movement in the face of a bitter power struggle with the radical Hamas-led Palestinian government. *AFP*

With $1B already wasted, more Katrina abuse yet to emerge

By Hope Yen

WASHINGTON—ALREADY AT $1 billion, the tally for Hurricane Katrina waste will balloon next year as investigators shift their attention from fraudulent aid to the lucrative government contracts awarded with little competition.

Several of the contracts were hastily given to politically connected firms in the aftermath of the 2005 storm and were extended without warning months later. Critics say the arrangements promote waste and unfairly hurt small companies. Currently, half of the government's contracts valued at $500,000 or greater are no-bid.

In January, federal investigators will release the first of several audits examining abuse in more than $12 billion in Katrina contracts. The charges range from political favoritism to limited opportunities for small and minority-owned firms, which initially got only 1.5 percent of the total work.

Katrina swept ashore on Aug. 29, 2005, in southern Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, leveling homes and businesses along the Gulf Coast. Its storm surge breached levees in New Orleans, unleashing a flood that inundated the city. The hurricane left more than 1,300 people dead, hundreds of thousands homeless and tens of billions of dollars worth of damage.

A series of government investigations in the storm's wake faulted the Bush administration for underestimating the threat and failing to prepare by pre-negotiating contracts for basic supplies in what has become the nation's costliest disaster.

Earlier this month, the Government Accountability Office said its initial estimate of $1 billion in disaster aid waste was "likely understated," citing continuing problems in which FEMA doled out tens of millions of dollars in fraudulent housing assistance.

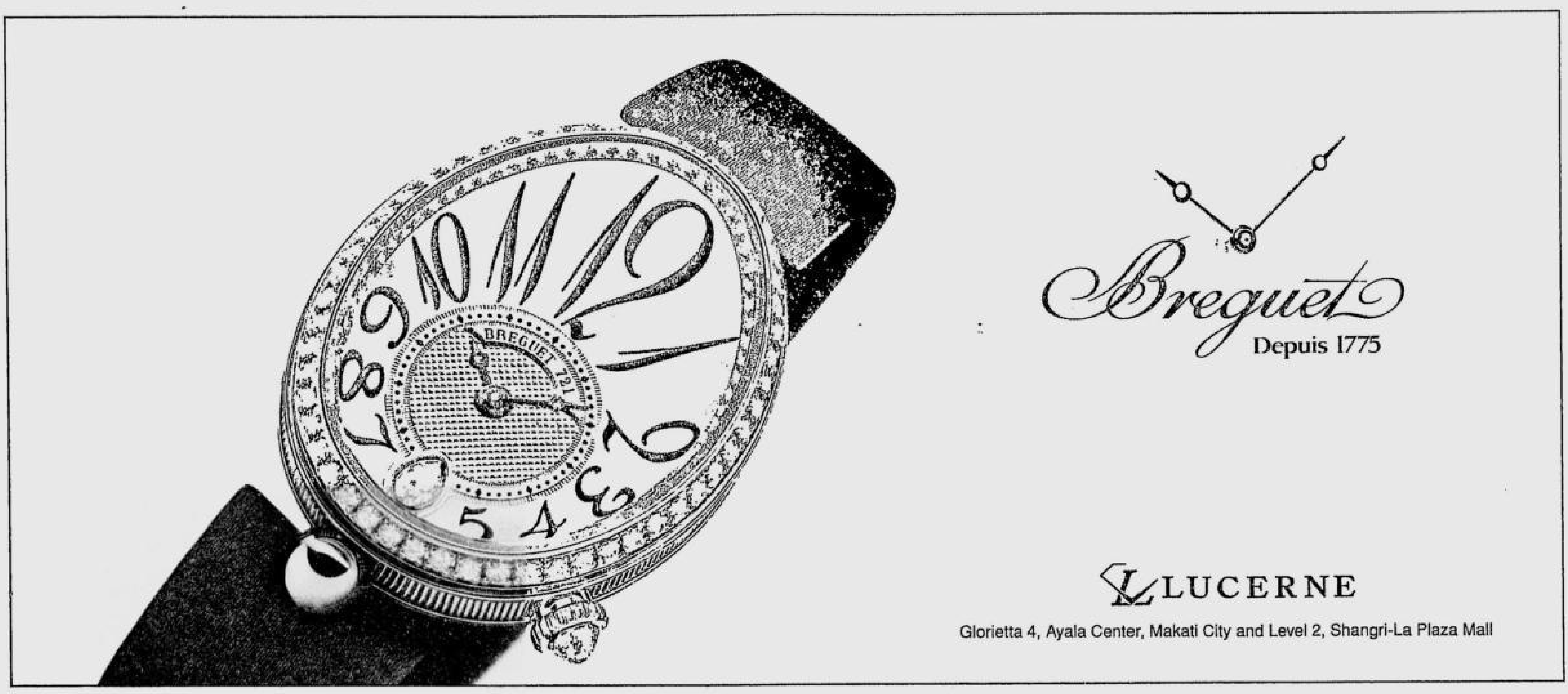
"Based on their track record, it wouldn't surprise me if we saw another billion more in waste," said Clark Kent Ervin, the Homeland Security Department's inspector general from 2003-2004. "I don't think sufficient progress has been made."

He called it inexcusable that the Bush administration would still have so many no-bid contracts, noting that auditors and Federal Emergency Management Agency director David Paulison himself have said they are prime areas for waste.

"It's a combination of laziness, ineptitude and it may well be nefarious," Ervin said.

FEMA spokesperson James McIntyre said the agency was working to fix its mistakes by awarding contracts for future disasters through competitive bidding. Paulison has said he welcomes additional oversight but cautioned against investigations that are not based on "new evidence and allegations."

Democrats in Congress called for more accountability. When they take over in January, at least seven committees plan hearings or other oversight—from housing to disaster loans—on how the $88 billion approved for Katrina relief is being spent. *AP*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The WORLD

Editor **Luverne B. Gueco**

US deaths in Iraq exceed toll count in 9/11 attacks

BAGHDAD, IRAQ—THE US MILITARY DEATH toll in Iraq has reached 2,974, one more than the number of deaths in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, according to an Associated Press count on Tuesday.

The US military said two soldiers died Monday in a bomb explosion southwest of Baghdad.

The deaths raised the number of troops killed to 2,974 since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003. The Sept. 11 attacks claimed 2,973 victims in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

"The joint patrol was conducting security operations in order to stop terrorists from placing roadside bombs in the area," the military said in a statement on the latest deaths. "As they conducted their mission, a roadside bomb exploded near one of their vehicles."

Another soldier was wounded in the explosion, the military said.

Earlier Monday, the US command announced the deaths of two other soldiers and a Marine. It said one soldier died and two were wounded when a roadside bomb exploded near a US military vehicle in southern Baghdad on Monday.

An American soldier and a Marine died Sunday from combat wounds suffered in Anbar province, the military said.

Prior to the latest deaths, the AP count was 15 higher than the Defense Department's tally, last updated Friday at 10 a.m. EST. At least 2,377 died as a result of hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

The British military has reported 126 deaths; Italy, 33; Ukraine, 18; Poland, 18; Bulgaria, 13; Spain, 11; Denmark, six; El Salvador, five; Slovakia, four; Estonia, Netherlands, Thailand, two each; and Australia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Romania, one death each.

On Monday, British soldiers backed by tanks raided a police station in the southern city of Basra, killing seven gunmen in an effort to stop renegade Iraqi officers from executing their prisoners, the British military said.

After the British stormed the Basra police station, they removed the prisoners, who showed evidence of torture, then evacuated the building before blowing it up.

The operation showed how closely aligned some police units are with militias and death squads—and the challenges coalition forces face as they transfer authority for security to Iraqis.

In Baghdad, police found 40 bodies, apparent victims of sectarian violence. A car bomb exploded beside a market and a suicide bomber struck a bus in separate attacks that killed 14 civilians and wounded at least 33.

In the Basra raid, the British set out to arrest officers with the station's serious crimes unit who were suspected of involvement with Shiite death squads. Seven members of the rogue police unit were apprehended three days ago in other raids, said a British spokesperson, Royal Navy Lt. Jenny Saleh.

"We had intelligence to indicate that the serious crimes unit would execute its prisoners in the coming days, so we decided to intervene," Saleh said.

British troops were fired on as they approached the station and their return fire killed seven gunmen, said Maj. Charlie Burbridge, another British military spokesperson.

British and Iraqi forces transferred all 76 prisoners at the station to another facility in downtown Basra, he said. Some prisoners had "classic torture injuries" such as crushed hands and feet, cigarette and electrical burns and gunshot wounds in the knees, Burbridge said.

The British demolished the building in an effort to disband the unit. "We identified the serious crimes unit as, frankly, too far gone," Burbridge said. "We just had to get rid of it."

The unit's members, he alleged, were involved in tribal and political feuds in southern Iraq, which is mostly Shiite. They were not, he said, engaged in the kind of sectarian reprisal killings that have terrorized mixed neighborhoods of Baghdad.

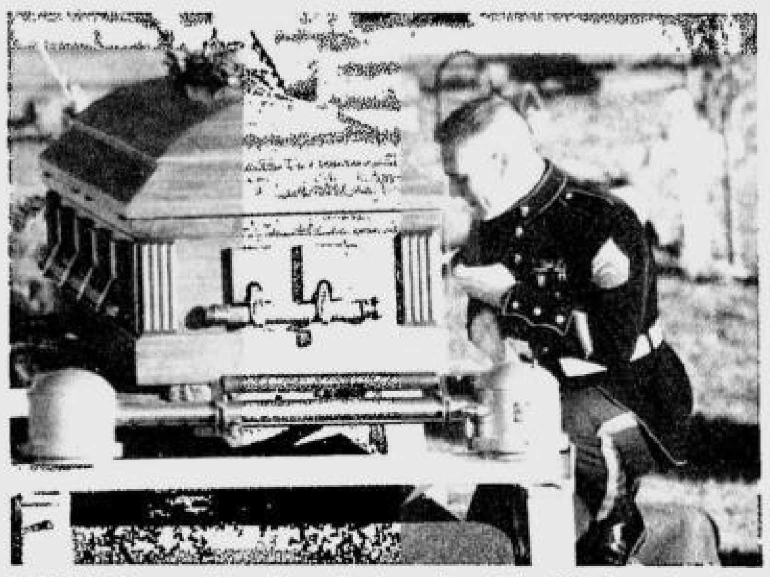
Most of Britain's 7,200 troops in Iraq are based in the Basra area.

Mohammed al-Askari, a spokesperson for Iraq's Defense Ministry, said the operation was coordinated with the Iraqi government. "Multinational forces got approval for this raid from this ministry and with participation of the Iraqi army," he said.

US Army Lt. Gen. Martin Dempsey, who is in charge of training Iraqi forces, said in Washington last week that efforts were under way to weed out Iraqi national police believed to be sympathetic to the militias.

Up to a quarter are thought to be aligned with the militias, which are engaged in sectarian violence.

The establishment of a viable Iraqi police force is vital to the US-led coalition's goal of handing responsibility for security to Iraqis, so foreign troops can return home. *AP*



MARINE Corporal Jesse Hassell grieves Dec. 19 beside the casket of friend Marine Lance Cpl. Brent E. Beeler killed in combat in Iraq. REUTERS

US probes arrests of 2 Iranians in Iraq

WASHINGTON—THE WHITE House said Monday it will wait for results of an investigation into two Iranians arrested in neighboring Iraq before judging whether they confirm Iranian meddling in Iraqi affairs.

US forces in Iraq arrested the pair after releasing two other Iranians who had diplomatic immunity.

The White House declined to reveal the nature of charges against the detainees, but cited Iranian "meddling" in Iraqi affairs.

"We suspect this event validates our claims about Iranian meddling, but we want to finish our investigation of the detained Iranians before characterizing their activities," White House spokesperson Alex Conant said.

The spokesperson said two of the detainees had been handed over to Iraqi authorities.

The arrests come amid mounting diplomatic tension between Iran, the United States and the international community, after the UN Security Council voted to impose sanctions on Iran's nuclear program.

The United States accuses Tehran of feeding the violence in Iraq, saying it sees Iranian fingerprints on Shiite militias and the makeshift roadside bombs that have killed many US soldiers.

US commanders in Iraq regularly accuse Iran of fomenting unrest in its troubled neighbor, but the Shiite-led Baghdad government has pursued closer security ties with Tehran. *AFP*

Arnie to undergo surgery

SAN FRANCISCO—CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger returned to the state for surgery after breaking his leg in an Idaho skiing accident over the weekend, a spokesperson said.

Schwarzenegger, 59, will undergo non-emergency surgery Tuesday morning to repair his fractured right femur, which he broke while skiing with his family in Sun Valley, Idaho, on Saturday, spokesperson Julie Soderlund said Monday.

The procedure will use cables and screws to secure the governor's upper right thigh bone, said Dr. Kevin Ehrhart, the orthopedic surgeon performing the surgery at an undisclosed hospital in Los Angeles.

The governor, who has already been admitted to the hospital, will be placed under general anesthesia for no longer than two hours, though the surgery is not expected to last that long, Ehrhart said.

California Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante will serve as acting governor while Schwarzenegger is under anesthesia, said Andrea Lynn Hoch, the governor's legal affairs secretary. *AP*

IN SENEGAL, A POWERFUL IMAGE OF 2006

An aerial view shows pools of mineral-colored water gathered on salt flats in holes dug by salt collectors on the Senegalese coastline near the border with Gambia June 12. Women collect salt by hand into 50kg sacks, which sell for about $2, and are traded with neighboring Gambia and Mauritania, where salt is mainly used for preserving fish in areas without electricity. REUTERS

Japanese in building scandal gets 5 years

TOKYO—A JAPANESE ARCHITECT at the center of a scandal over unsafe buildings was sentenced to five years in prison on Tuesday for his role in a scandal that left scores of apartments and hotels vulnerable to even moderate earthquakes.

The scandal, in which quake-resistance data was falsified for buildings, first broke more than a year ago and outraged the public in the earthquake-prone country.

Hidetsugu Aneha, 49, who has been stripped of his architect license, had already pleaded guilty after faking data for nearly 100 apartments and hotels that he had designed, in a bid to cut costs out of fear he would lose contractors' business.

Aneha had added that his wife was in poor health. She was found dead in March, and media reports quoted police as saying it may have been suicide.

Aneha was also fined 1.8 million yen ($15,000) in the case, in which he was indicted for fabricating data for four condominiums and two hotels, the Tokyo District Court said.

An architectural designer linked to the scandal was given a suspended sentence on Tuesday, the court said.

Two others, a construction company executive and the head of a building inspection firm, have also received suspended sentences for falsifying company financial statements.

The scandal, which experts said had its roots in a drive to cut costs, prompted criticism of the government for lax building inspections.

Many of the hotels have been forced to shut down, although some have reopened after reinforcement work. *Reuters*

Trial reveals how Serbian fugitive Mladic hid

BELGRADE, SERBIA—AFTER 11 years, the hunt for Radovan Karadzic and Gen. Ratko Mladic may well be the most frustrating, infuriating and fruitless around.

The two, wanted for the most heinous crimes of Bosnia's bloody civil war from 1992 to 1995, have managed to elude thousands of Western peacekeepers and local police forces with what is widely suspected to be the collusion of the Serbian military. Reality and myth have grown indistinguishable as stories have emerged of their possible hiding places and of the failed attempts to track them down.

Now, for the first time, clear—even mundane—details of how Mladic has managed to dodge arrest are emerging bit by bit in a Belgrade courtroom.

Until January this year, the general, the former commander of the Bosnian Serb army, was living in the Serbian capital protected by a network of former comrades in arms, according to testimony given during the trial of 11 people accused of helping to hide him.

Evidence at the trial describes an urban odyssey that started out with the general hiding in Belgrade's best-known army barracks with the full knowledge of the army hierarchy, and then shows him being whisked away in a Yugo by bodyguards to a private apartment.

For a period of 3 1/2 years, the onetime Yugoslav army officer—who is still regarded as a hero by many Serbs but is vehemently despised by the Bosnian Muslims he victimized—moved among six addresses. He used some for a matter of days and others for months, before finally holing up in a Communist-era monolith for more than two years. There, prosecutors say, he was provided with a housekeeper, and groceries and phone cards were brought to his door.

Throughout, he seemed to have the protection of the army and state officials. At one point, he was offered plastic surgery and a false passport to help him flee the country, something he appears to have declined. To this day, he still eludes arrest.

Mladic and Karadzic, the political leader of the Bosnian Serbs, were indicted at the end of the Bosnian war by an international war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for laying siege to Sarajevo and masterminding the massacre in 1995 in Srebrenica of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys.

The trial of the 11 began in September, after intense international pressure on the Serbian government to prove it was trying to find Mladic. *New York Times News Service*

MAO AP

Mao: A monster or an authentic Chinese hero?

HONOLULU—WAS MAO ZEdong a monster or an authentic Chinese hero? A selfish, unfeeling lecher or a great revolutionary who liberated China from foreign domination, poverty and disease?

Historians, journalists and many Chinese are still pondering these questions at the 113th anniversary of the birth of Mao, father of communist China.

His successors, presiding over a booming economy, refuse to answer. They let Sept. 9, the 30th anniversary of Mao's death at 82, pass quietly, without fuss or fanfare, and were expected to do the same on his birthday on Tuesday.

In early February 1946, Mao invited me, a newly minted Associated Press correspondent, to eat with him at his modest lodgings in Yan'an, his encircled and barricaded cave capital next to the Gobi desert. I was in Yan'an to report on negotiations to bring the warring Nationalist and Communist factions together.

The moonfaced peasant's son met me at the door of his simple one-story house, but he no longer was the slender, wiry youth of the Long March that saved the communist rebellion in the 1930s. A lack of exercise and love of good food—apparent at the dinner as one delicious dish succeeded the other—had turned Mao into a roly-poly figure whose padded, worn blue jacket and trousers made him seem like a Chinese kewpie doll.

His longtime personal physician, Li Zhisui, revealed that in his old age Mao was a self-indulgent, sometimes senile rogue who seduced young female admirers.

The second book, "Mao: The Unknown Story," by Jung Chang, and her husband, Jon Halliday, claimed, among other things, that Mao wasn't a real revolutionary, and gave thousands of tons of grain to other communist countries knowing that millions of Chinese peasants would die of hunger as a result. *AP*

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WHAT'S INSIDE

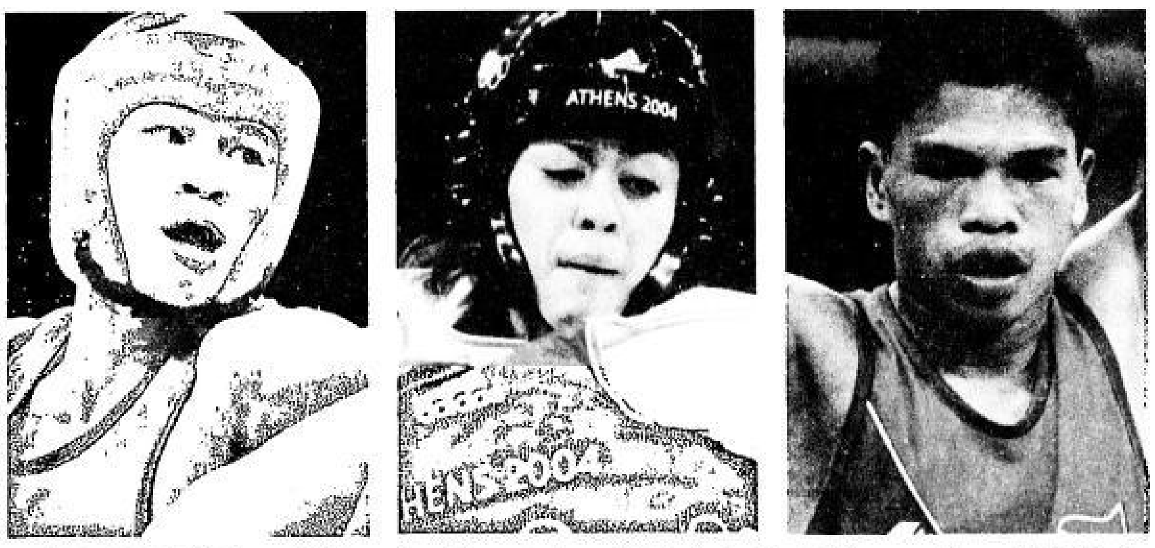
Athlete of the Year award surprises Tiger /A25

Miller is new ace of Aces as Alaska rises /A24

PSC races to find Olympic heroes

Two or 4 years may not be enough for RP gold bid in Beijing, says Ramirez

By June Navarro



BEIJING SHOO-INS: From left, boxer Joan Tipon, taekwondo's Marie Antoinette Rivero and boxer Violito Payla.

IT WILL TAKE ANOTHER generation of athletes before the Philippines could regain its lofty billing in Asia, and much longer to achieve parity with the world's best.

Officials of the Philippine Olympic Committee and the Philippine Sports Commission will be guided by this framework when they sit down soon and begin paving the road to the Olympics.

"We better start now because two or four years may not be enough for us to get the gold in the Olympics," said PSC chair William "Butch" Ramirez. "Success in sports takes a lot of time to achieve."

Ramirez cited the achievements of China and Australia, two countries which have been reaping honors internationally after installing viable long-term programs.

The chef de mission of Team Philippines in the recent Doha Asian Games said the PSC plans to duplicate the Chinese and Australian models on talent identification and scientific training.

When he starts plotting the strategy for the 2008 Beijing Olympics with POC president Jose "Peping" Cojuangco, the scheme will delve more on fundamentals, Ramirez said.

"We're not doing what the Germans, Chinese, Australians and the Americans are doing," said Ramirez. "These countries start from the basic process of identifying the talents and then nurturing them to become world champions."

He explained that athletes should be discovered at an early age and schooled in a sports institution to maximize their potentials.

"That's how they do it," said Ramirez. "Sadly, we don't have that kind of philosophy. It's quite lamentable that even the Palarong Pambansa is not being supervised by the national sports associations."

The Department of Education runs the Palarong Pambansa, one of the government's grassroots development programs for sports, apart from the Mindanao Friendship Games.

"What we lack is a unified sports program, that's why the goal of catching up with the best of the world is a long and arduous task for us," said Ramirez.

"If we begin now, we could get somewhere."

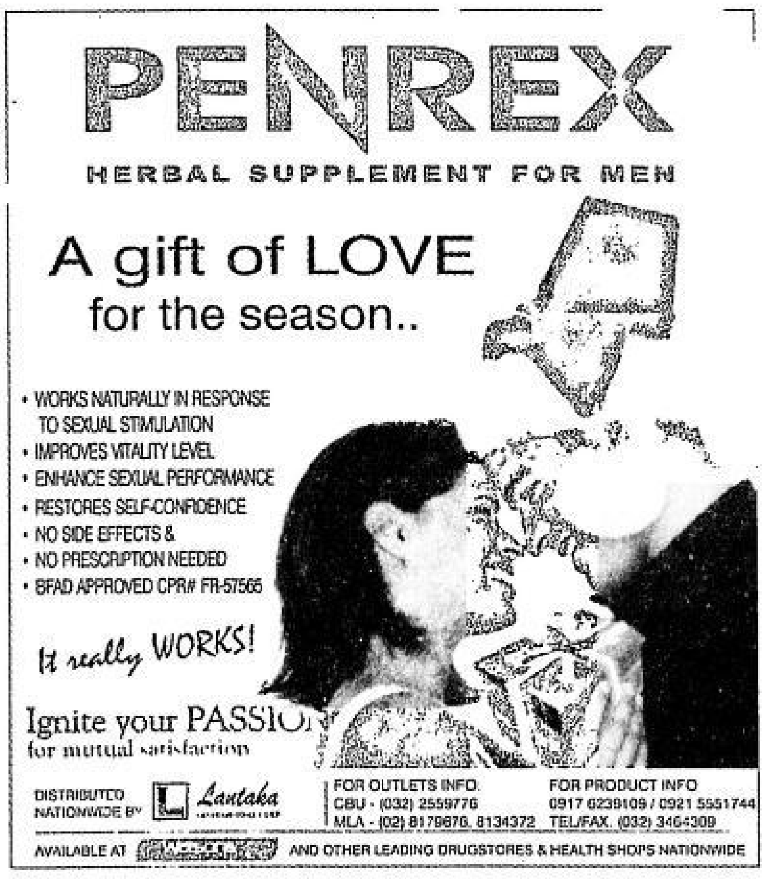
For starters, Ramirez said the country should focus on individual talents and sports in which Filipinos have a realistic chance of winning medals internationally.

"Other countries have strong traditions in certain sports," he said. "Hong Kong won its first gold in the Olympics through windsurfing—and they're good at that sport, while the Africans are great long-distance runners.

"Ever wondered why Thailand won more medals in the Doha Asiad than its Southeast Asian neighbors? It's because they swept all five gold medals in sepak takraw, Thailand's pet sport."

Ramirez said that aside from scientific training, other countries invest millions of dollars in their finest athletes.

"We are going to fight countries with big budgets, sports institutes and governments with so much concern for sports," he said.



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Gomez stuns Chinese GM; So, Paragua lose

DABLEO

PARAGUA

FILIPINO FIDE MASTER JOHN PAUL GOMEZ upset Chinese Grandmaster Wang Rui even as compatriots IM Wesley So and GM Mark Paragua dropped their games in the opening round of the 2006 Singapore Masters chess tournament yesterday.

The 20-year-old Gomez, a former national junior champion, will take on Singaporean FM Graham Chua Xing-jian, winner over Raymond Song of Australia, in today's second round of the event being held at the ASEAN Chess Academy.

The 13-year-old So, who became the youngest ever Filipino national champion ever after topping the recent 2nd Prospero Pichay Cup, yielded to GM Zhao Jun of China using the black pieces.

Paragua, the country's highest-rated player, bowed to GM Zhang Zhong with white.

Singapore-based IM Enrique Paciencia and NM Eric Gloria also hurdled their first assignments.

Paciencia, a native of Tacloban City, bested fellow Filipino and Singapore chess instructor IM Luis Chiong IV, while Gloria took the measure of Dotsenko Viacheslav of Russia.

IM Ronald Dableo, seeking his third and last GM result, settled for a draw against countryman FM Roderick Nava.

IM Yves Rañola also split the point with GM Dao Thien Hai of Vietnam.

Singapore-based Filipino FM Julio Catalino Sadorra and FM Anthony Makinano bowed to China's Zhou Weigi and Singapore's Teo Wei-Xing, respectively.

Dr. Alfredo Paez, the country's newest Fide certified chess instructor, settled for a draw with Woman GM Xu Yuanyuan of China.

GM Zhang Pengxiang, winner of the 1st PGMA International Chess Championships recently, is the top seed in the 94-man field.

Penxiang, who totes an Elo of 2636, beat Indian IM Vijayyalashmi Subbaraman in the first round.

Lyndon Sombilon, a native of Davao City, bested Junaid Pamungkas of Indonesia in the Challengers section.

Meanwhile, La Salle Green Hills placed second behind Singapore in the 15-team Asean International School meet at the same venue last week. *Marlon Bernardino, Contributor*

Pro league eyes QC, Taguig as site for new PBA dome

THE PHILIPPINE BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION plans to build its own coliseum soon either in Quezon City or Taguig City.

League officials said the choice has been narrowed down to the sprawling vacant lot near the Manila Seedling Bank in Quezon City and the Global City in Taguig.

Taguig Mayor Freddie Tinga offered the Global City site during a recent meeting with PBA commissioner Noli Eala.

"At present, Quezon City has the edge in proximity and accessibility," Eala said. "We'll have no problem there with regards to transportation, especially because of the MRT.

"Mayor Tinga, however, said they have a program which deals with transportation. In three years, the mayor said everything will be in place."

"This has been the PBA's dream for a long time," said PBA boar chair Ricky Vargas of Talk 'N Text. "It's about time that we go for it.

Smart and PLDT chair Manny V. Pangilinan has already acquired dome designs and is now consultating with architects, according to league sources.

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TRINIDAD

PBL rides high on innovative cage program

By Jasmine W. Payo

COMMISSIONER CHINO TRINIDAD DOES not mind if the PBL has become an extension of the country's two top collegiate leagues.

It's an innovative setup that works, Trinidad says, and the league intends to stick to it.

"This formula we stumbled upon only synchronized a year-round basketball program," he said.

In recent PBL conferences, more companies have forged partnerships with schools from the UAAP and the NCAA.

GAMES ON JAN. 6 (*Olivarez College Sports Center*)
2 p.m.—Mall and More vs Kettle Korn-UST
4 p.m.—Hapee-PCU vs Habrour Centre

In the ongoing Silver Cup, six of the nine teams opted to form school-based teams.

"The companies see the viability of the program," said Trinidad. "It's not mandatory, but coordination is easier."

The reigning collegiate champions inked deals with two giant food and beverage corporations.

NCAA titlist San Beda signed up its key players to a two-year pact with Magnolia of San Miguel Corp., while UAAP champion University of Santo Tomas partnered with Kettle Korn of RFM.

Hapee Toothpaste tapped the core of Philippine Christian University, while Toyota Otis teamed up with Letran.

There are also tie-ups between Henkel Sista and St. Benilde, and between Harbour Centre and National University.

Trinidad pointed out that the program is also logistically advantageous to both the companies and the league.

"It's more practical to deal with the teams," he said. "There's no need to break up the players. There are less irritants, like in fixing the schedule.

"The good thing about college-based teams is there are natural rooters," Trinidad added. "They bring in the crowd, there's already a fan-base."

And with the departure of amateur powerhouse Welcoat Paints to the pro league this year, the PBL landscape has changed further.

"More teams mean opportunities for more players to play," Trinidad said. "It's a venue for them to discover for themselves if they have a career in basketball or how it's like to have a career in basketball."

Miller is new ace of Aces as Alaska rises

BEING A FORMER PBA MOST VALUABLE player, Willie Miller is not supposed to go unmarked when soaring.

Yet that's precisely what the 5-foot-11 guard has been doing, flying under the radar, and in the process stoking Alaska's drive to go farther in the Talk 'N Text PBA Philippine Cup.

In the past week alone, the league's best in 2002 stacked up the numbers, leading the Aces to two wins going into the wild-card phase.

"He was putting up some big numbers and I was wondering if anyone would take notice," said Alaska coach Tim Cone of Miller.

Members of the PBA Press Corps didn't miss Miller's exploits and named him its Accel-Talk 'N Text Player of the Week for the period Dec. 18-Dec. 25.

It was the second such citation bestowed on Miller, who also earned the honor for the period Nov. 20-26. He joined two-time winners Mark Caguioa and Rudy Hatfield of Barangay Ginebra and Danny Seigle of San Miguel Beer.

Cone believes that Miller, who was moved to the starting point guard role, deserves the award.

"He's playing as well—or better than—his MVP year," said Cone.

In the 96-90 win over Welcoat last Dec. 20, Miller had 24 points, nine rebounds, five assists, two blocks and a steal.

The Olongapo native followed that up with a near-triple double of 25 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds as the Aces wound up the qualification round with their third straight win, a hard-earned 96-92 overtime decision over Purefoods Chunkee.

With that winning skein, the Aces wound up with eight wins against 10 losses—the record they will be carrying over to the wild-card round starting in January.

The wild card is a single round robin format among the sixth- to ninth-placed teams to determine the fourth and final semifinalist.

Alaska's carryover record puts it at seventh, two games behind either Purefoods or Sta. Lucia Realty, who wound up with 10-8 slates and will be playing off on Jan. 3 to determine who will be relegated to the wild card.

As things stand, the Aces' hopes are pinned mostly on sweeping the wild card and winning the playoff game against the team that emerges with a better record.

Cone knows exactly what Miller's role will be for the squad in the next phase.

"The important thing for us right now is getting through the wild card," said Cone. "Willie will play a big part in that."

WILLIE Miller (right) is Coach Cone's reliable trump card.

MILO JUNIOR CUP

Malaysian siblings rout rivals, gain 2nd round

MALAYSIAN BROTHERS AUGUSTINE AND Oscar Chang whitewashed separate local hopes yesterday at the start of the 2006 Milo Junior Tennis Cup at the Philam Homes Tennis Club in Quezon City.

Augustine routed Joel Atienza, 6-0, 6-0, in the 10-under division while Oscar whipped Kevin Mamawal by the same score in 14-under play as the Malaysians opened their bid with a bang in the year-ender age-group tournament.

Division favorites Jose Lorenzo Ferrer and Kyle Cordero also advanced in the boys' 14-under bracket after scoring similar 6-0, 6-0 romps over Patrick Paez and Ali Arsad, respectively.

Joining Augustine Chang in the next round of the 10-under class at the PRB Tennis Center are Jose Lorenzo Cruz, Margaret Flores, Darwin de los Reyes and Jacob Echague.

Cruz overwhelmed Caitlin Tordesillas, 6-1, 6-0; Flores ousted Jade Capadocia, 6-3, 6-3; De los Reyes outplayed Sydney Alex Mella, 6-0, 6-4; and Echague bested Eliah Arevalo, 6-2, 6-1.

Other first-day winners in the tournament organized by the CTW, supported by Prince equipment and sanctioned by the Philta were Isaiah Dandan, Grigori Kuznetsov and Mark Santiago.

Manny Pacquiao trader of the year?

BARE EYE

Recah Trinidad

(GIFTS: They would rather remain anonymous. But there's no harm mentioning the names of selfless fellows who have again made today's gift-giving for children of farm and poultry workers in Barangay Pangao, Lipa City, a reality: Nandy Charvet, Dr. Ruel Reyes, Ramon Rivero, Lucio Yan, Gerry Mayor, Marcelino Maralit, Danny Silva, Joebing Malabanan, Robert Jaworski and Rene Monte. Thank you, again, fellows.)

* * *

THE PHILIPPINE SPORTSWRITERS ASSOciation is having a hard time picking the singular performer who will be declared Athlete of the Year.

No, not because we are lacking in deserving big winners.

In fact, one problem facing the PSA, founded in 1949, involves boxing superstar Manny Pacquiao.

Pacquiao, named by Sports Network and matchboxing.com Boxer of the Year, appears over-qualified for PSA's grand award.

* * *

You see, the PSA had actually picked Pacquiao Athlete of the Year at least a couple of times in the past.

But left with a slew of world-class victors and at least four Asian Games gold medalists, the PSA appears in a bind.

Knowing Pacquiao, he would be glad enough being lumped together with big Filipino victors like Efren "Bata" Reyes and Ronnie Alcano of billiards, Joan Tipon and Violito Payla of amateur boxing.

However, there were ready suggestions that Pacquiao, with his impact on world sports, could instead by given a bigger award, like Filipino Athlete of the Decade, while the others could be grouped together as Athletes of the Year.

There's a happy excess of deserving performers.

But expect PSA's resident worriers to come up with a perfect solution before the year ends.

* * *

We already knew that, in Pacquiao's case, it's no longer a simple story of winning.

His achievements in 2006, the twin knockout victories over the legendary Erik Morales and a sensational dominance of Oscar Larios, another Mexican, are clearly a tale of greatness.

Yes, Pacman loomed the finest boxer of the period—and also the most marketable.

His worth in gold has, in fact, resulted in a fierce promotional tug-of-war between the venerable Bob Arum of Top Rank and the charming Oscar De La Hoya of Golden Boy Promotions.

Don't look now. But some wags were quick to suggest that Pacquiao, given his price tag, should also be nominated Businessman of the Year, pointing to a hefty $5-million paycheck being dangled for him to fight world 130-pound king Marco Antonio Barrera, whom Pacman had knocked out in November 2003.

* * *

Of course, it was easy to detect some malice in the suggested naming of Manny Pacquiao as trader of the year.

Pacquiao may have overlooked moral obligations when he signed a seven-fight pact with De La Hoya—only to renounce the deal and agree to fight again under Arum.

That he did not stammer in signing the multimillion-dollar contract with De La Hoya—only to next renege on it—with no evident remorse, also bared in Pacquiao the makings of a fearless trader.

It was neither bright nor honorable, but bringing Arum and De La Hoya to tangle over him could have sadly become part of Pacquiao's managerial artillery.

* * *

Maybe Pacquiao (taking after his fan, the President?) no longer saw anything wrong with a man not honoring his word.

He has become so big and great he must've thought he was free to form and evolve his own set of values.

Now a revered two-fisted battler, Pacquiao saw nothing wrong with signing contracts left and right, as long as the price is right.

Sorry, folks, but in so doing, Pacquiao has also succeeded in projecting (to the world) the Filipino as a slurping, smacking diner who should be kept a great distance from eat-all-you-can tables.

It's, indeed, not very flattering, this picture of a greedy, mindless slugger—*suwangay* in *kanto* boy lingo—taking over the fearless Pacman whom Filipinos have learned to adore for his resiliency.

Can we blame cheated promoters for predictably dangling big money—a $5-million paycheck—to win back Pacquiao into honoring a written commitment?

SPORTSWATCH

Hundreds vying in charity darts tourney

THE "GOOD SAMARITAN SPIRIT" AMONG DARTERS WILL AGAIN BE showcased in the "Bisig Darter-Huling Hirit '06," a classified doubles charity tournament which fires off at 8 p.m. at Pearl Plaza Mall on Quirino Avenue in Parañaque City. Proceeds of the tournament will be donated to several charitable institutions. Registration starts at 7 p.m.

80 fights in Makati 'Salpukan' today

THE SIXTH AND LAST ELIMINATION ROUND OF THE THE P3-MILLION "PAmaskong Salpukan" 6-cock derby blasts off at 5 p.m. today at the Makati Coliseum with 257 entries seeing action. Participants scoring three wins will share in the P100,000 day prize, according to promoters Lito Orillaza, Rudy Salud and William Co of WTJ Sports and Amusement Corp. The derby, sponsored by B-Meg Derby Ace and Gran Matador, will have 80 fights. So far, 22 participants have remained unbeaten with three wins each. The grand championship unfolds this Saturday. For inquiries, call 896-3545 or 895-6475.

Las Piñas derby stakes P500,000

A PRIZE POT OF P500,000 AWAIT THE WINNERS IN THE "NEW YEAR 4-Cock Derby" at the Las Piñas Coliseum this Saturday. The cockfest, to be hosted by Mayor Nene Aguilar, ends the cockfighting season. At least 50 popular cockers and breeders are taking part. Aside from the cash prizes, two refrigerators will go to the winners. Entry fee is P11,000. Entries must be submitted on derby day. Call 873-1040, 874-3910 or 0926-7450375. Last Saturday, the St. Jude entry of Cavite derbyist Eboy Montano topped the Christmas 4-cock derby hosted by coliseum manager Alex Tobias and RC Sayaman.

Iñigo matriarch passes away

LUCIA STA. ROSA IÑIGO, MOTHER OF INQUIRER SPORTS COLUMNIST Manolo Iñigo, died yesterday at the family residence in Tabing Ilog, Marilao, Bulacan. She was 88. She is survived by sons Manolo, Jose and Pancho Manalad and daughter Chuchie Iñigo-Hermoso. Interment will be at the Marilao Memorial Park on Dec. 28 after a Mass at the San Gabriel Parish Church.

Nationwide quest for fresh b'minton hotshots launched

By Marc Anthony Reyes

IT'S TIME TO DO SOME HOUSE-CLEANING in local badminton.

To get rid of recycled players, a comprehensive, multi-leg tour will be launched all over the country to scour the countryside for fresh badminton talents.

That's the immediate thrust of the Philippine Badminton Association next year as national coach Errol Chan bared the mechanics of the eight-leg Yonex-Sunrise regional championships.

Chan said slots in the national developmental pool are at stake in the tournament.

The move was spurred by the Philippines' medal shutout in the 2005 Southeast Asian Games and the recent Doha Asian Games despite the huge popularity of the sport in the country.

Chan, who also handles the PBA's developmental program, said current tournaments give premium on the corporate level and neglects the grassroots level.

"That's what we're aiming for when we conceptualized the idea of putting up a regional-based tournament: give premium on sports development in the grassroots level," said Francis Salas, tour co-chair and regional coordinator.

The tournament actually kicked off with the Pampanga leg last Dec. 2-3.

It will be followed by the Cebu edition on Jan. 26-28 at the Portside Badminton Center.

Collegiate players Derrick Chan and Recxon Salvaleon topped level A in the Pampanga leg.

Michael Paclibar and Shiela Rodejo won over siblings Sylvester and Rollaine Cosico in the mixed doubles. In the 16-under event, Aira Pineda paired with Malou Gaspar and then with Mervyn Santiago for the girls' doubles title and the mixed doubles plum, respectively.

NEW tour will find successors to the Asuncion siblings, RP's most recognizable players.

Taguig track opens Friday: Namssa fetes top riders

A FIVE-HECTARE, FENCED OFF-road race track will be built soon in Upper Bicutan, Taguig City, according to its developers.

To be called the Fast Track Motorsports Park, the track's construction has received the support of Taguig Mayor Freddie Tiñga.

The motorsports park will be launched this Friday as a motocross track. A fully air-conditioned clubhouse and function hall, owned and operated by Xtreme Worx Philippines, will be built inside the facility.

To test its conformity to safety standards, the National Motorcycle Safety and Sports Association and the Federation Internationale de Motocycliste will stage its Yearend Awards and the 1st EcoFuel Underbone Competition on Friday.

Tiñga and Rep. Jack Enrile will later present the awards to the national bike champions.

The Namssa awardees: 2006 Rider of the Year: Glenn Aguilar, motocross; Jolet Jao, superbike; BJ Mendoza, underbone. Other motocross class champions: McLean Aguilar, 50cc (7 and below), Jacob Orbe, 50cc (9 and below), Patrick Orbe, 65cc; Jenzen Manuel, 85cc; Hermis Bantoc, Executive class; Jun Jun San Andres, Veterans class; Francyl Barrido, Novice Enduro; Heres Jun Suresca, Novice Production; Alvin Beech, Intermediate class.

Race 1—(Qrt/Tri)—Miata (4), Mr. Love (6), Golden Music (7), Windtalker (2)
Race 2—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Detective Daryll (9), Prophet (1), Kawiliwili (2), Lord of the Ring (1), Happy Again (7)
Race 3—(Qrt/Tri)—Devil Rising (7), Hot Stuff (6), Royal Halo (3), Venus D'Goddess (4)
Race 4—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Brazilian Babe (2), Amazing Jel (6), Showgirl (7), Color My World (4), Tambuli (8)

RACING TIPS

BY TOP CHOICE

Race 5—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Jagger/Joker (12), Money Man (6), Azukarera de Mama (4), Black Peacock (9), Pretty Pretty Girl (8)
Race 6—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Lightning Strike (1), Jay Nicole (13), Cheska Run (12), Kim Possible (9), Bunker Buster (11)
Race 7—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Gung Ho (3), Karma (2), Yukozuna (8), Ayan Na Ko (6), Sweet Talk (10)
Race 8—(Penta/Qrt/Tri)—Gold Money (3), Don Ramon (1), Friendly Venture (2), Regal Times (4), Ferrarione (13)
Race 9—(Super 6/Qrt/Tri)—Mulligan (5), Once And For All (11), Blitzkrieg (4), Kiwi Rose (3), American Idol (13), Lady Cathy (8)

Wade outplays Bryant as Heat trample Lakers

MIAMI—DWYANE WADE SCORED A season-high 40 points and passed out 11 assists in a spectacular one-man Chirstmas performance to lead the Miami Heat past the Los Angeles Lakers, 101-85, here Monday.

Wade hit 12-of-20 shots and contributed four steals, four blocked shots and four rebounds while playing spirited defense against Lakers star Kobe Bryant in sparking the defending National Basketball Association champions to victory.

"This was a great game," Wade said.

"It's a great opportunity on Christmas Day. We wanted to go out there and take charge from the start and that's exactly what we did."

The Lakers, led by 16 points from Bryant and 13 from Frenchman Ronny Turiaf, fell behind by 14 points in the first half and could never overcome the Heat. Bryant hit only 4-of-17 from the field.

Wade ranks fourth in NBA scoring with 28.1 points a game while Bryant ranks sixth with 27.8 points a game. Bryant was impressed with Wade's one-man show.

"He is a hell of a young player," Bryant said. "He's really matched for coming off those screen-and-rolls and attacking. He's a phenomenal, phenomenal player."

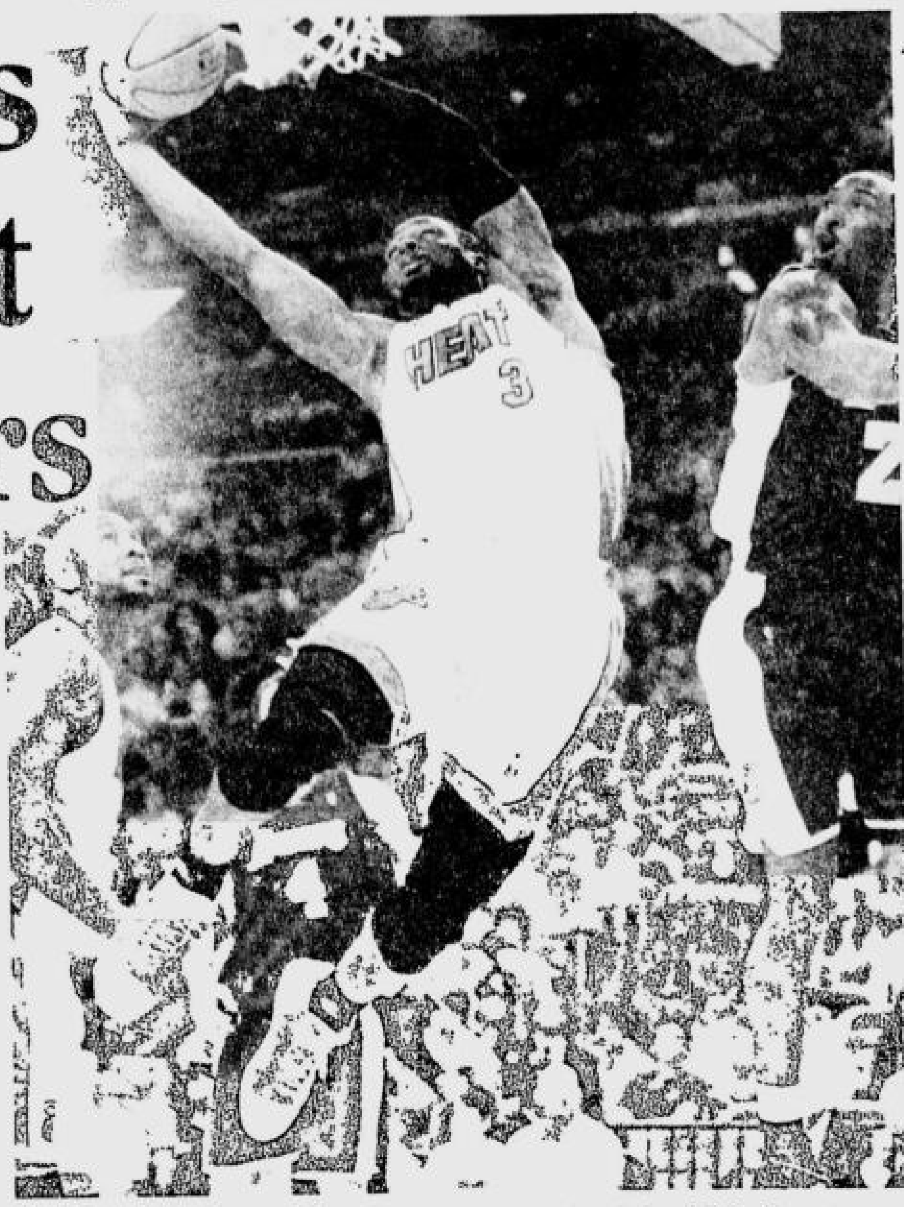
The Heat improved to 13-14, matching Milwaukee for eighth in the Eastern Conference with their first triumph of the season over a club with a winning record.

"We've been playing well of late," Wade said. "We're not looking at our record. We came out with a lot of energy. As long as we keep playing like that we will be all right."

Miami center Shaquille O'Neal, who won three NBA titles while playing for the Lakers, has been out for more than six weeks with a knee injury, leaving Wade in command of the Heat attack.

The Lakers slid to 18-10 on the season. Only San Antonio, Dallas and Utah have won more games this season.

Wade scored 18 points in the third quarter as the Heat, took a 74-58 lead. *AFP*



HEAT'S Dwyane Wade (3) drives to the basket against Lakers' Kobe Bryant (right) as Heat teammate Alonzo Mourning looks on. REUTERS

Eagles give fans perfect holiday gift

DALLAS—THE PHILADELPHIA EAGLES gave their fans the perfect Christmas present on Monday, clinching a playoff spot with a 23-7 win over the Dallas Cowboys.

The New York Jets were also in festive mood after Mike Nugent's field goal with 10 seconds left gave them a 13-10 win over the Miami Dolphins, keeping their post-season hopes alive.

New York (9-6) can clinch an AFC wild card spot if they beat Oakland (2-13) in their final regular season game.

The Eagles improved to 9-6 with their win, securing at least an NFC wild card spot. They also have the chance to claim the NFC East title for the fifth time in six years with a win over the Atlanta Falcons in their regular season finale.

The Cowboys (9-6) had already secured a playoff berth but to win the division they must now beat the Detroit Lions and hope the Eagles fall to the Falcons.

Written off as playoff no-hopers after a season-ending injury to Pro Bowl quarterback Donovan McNabb, the Eagles have soared to unexpected highs behind backup Jeff Garcia who directed Philadelphia to their fourth straight win. *Reuters*

Nadal targets better season

NADAL

PARIS—RAFAEL Nadal is determined to kick-off 2007 at full throttle and make up for the bitter disappointment of his injury-ravaged start to 2006.

A crippling foot injury ruled the world number two out of the first six weeks of this year, an absence which also included the opening Grand Slam event in Australia.

But in 2007, the French Open champion is wasting no time in his build-up to Melbourne where the Australian Open begins on January 15.

Nadal will begin his season on January 1 at the Chennai Open and then travel to Sydney for the Medibank International. At both events he will be top seed.

"I have a big motivation because when I come back to Australia it's one of my favorite tournaments and the weather is perfect for me," Nadal said in a teleconference to promote the Syndey event.

"Melbourne is one of my favorite cities in the world, a special city for me, and as well it is a big motivation. It's one of my special goals for 2007 to play well in Australia."

The 20-year-old ended the 2006 season amid a title drought. Nadal won 11 titles during 2005 and in 2006 he added five more from his first eight tournaments, including a second straight Roland Garros crown. *AFP*

Athlete of the Year award surprises Tiger

TIGER WOODS: Federer more deserving of the award. AP

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA—TIGER Woods had an answer for everything.

When he missed the cut at the U. Open for the first time in a major—his first tournament after his father died of cancer—some questioned whether he could rekindle his desire to dominate. He never finished worse than second in stroke play the rest of the season.

Phil Mickelson emerged anew as a serious threat to Woods' domain by winning his second straight major at the Masters and nearly making it three in a row at the US Open. Woods responded by winning the next two majors without breaking a sweat.

And there remained skepticism about his latest swing change, put to rest by a year that ranked among Woods' best ever on the PGA Tour. He won eight times in 15 starts, six in a row to close out his season, two more majors to reach 12 for his career.

About the only thing he couldn't answer was how he was voted AP Male Athlete of the Year.

Sports editors

Woods won the award in voting by US sports editors over San Diego Chargers running back LaDainian Tomlinson, with Swiss tennis great Roger Federer a distant third. The 31-year-old Woods won for the fourth time in his career, tying the record set by Lance Armstrong, who won the last four years.

While pleased to hear he had won the award, Woods was perplexed it did not go to his good friend Federer, who continues to dominate tennis. Woods was in Federer's box at Flushing Meadows when the Swiss star captured the US Open.

"What he's done in tennis, I think, is far greater than what I've done in golf," Woods said. "He's lost what ... five matches in three years? That's pretty good."

Federer actually has lost a few more than that, but not many. His record in 2006 was an amazing 92-5, including 12 singles titles.

Woods received 260 points from sports editors around the country. Tomlinson, who already has set an NFL record of 31 touchdowns with one regular-season game left, was second with 230 points. Federer, who won three Grand Slam titles and lost in the final at the French Open, had 110 points.

Rounding out the top of the list were Miami Heat guard Dwyane Wade (40 points) and St. Louis Cardinals slugger Albert Pujols and NL home run champion Ryan Howard of the Philadelphia Phillies (20 points each).

First player

Woods again made it look routine, winning at least eight PGA Tour events for the third time in his career and becoming the first player in history to capture multiple majors in consecutive seasons.

"Any time you're over 50 percent winning in our sports, it's probably a good year," Woods said. "I know how hard it is. I know what it takes to get to that point. I hate to say it, but people in the media and fans don't understand how hard it is. Players do. The things players have said to me over the years, that means a lot."

What made this year different from others was the magnitude of his loss.

After winning his first two tournaments of the year, the Buick Invitational and the Dubai Desert Classic on the European Tour, Woods' progress slowed as his father's health deteriorated. Earl Woods, the father, architect and driving force behind his son as a person and a player, died May 3. *AP*

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER TV GUIDE

Wednesday, December 27, 2006

Channel	2:30PM	3:00PM	3:30PM	4:00PM	4:30PM	5:00PM	5:30PM	6:00PM	6:30PM	7:00PM	7:30PM	8:00PM	8:30PM	9:00PM	9:30PM	10:00PM	10:30PM	11:00PM	11:30PM
ABC 5	Nickelodeon				PBA				Big News	PBA					Sentro	Frontlines		Araw-Araw Premyo Sa Rasibo	Simbang Gabi
ABS-CBN 2	Kapamilya Cinema				Inocente De Ti	Yu-Gi-Oh GX	Bert The Vandal Buster	Pangako Sa 'Yo	TV Patrol World		Kapamilya Deal Or No Deal	Super Inggo (8:15 PM)		Maging Sino Ka Man	Princess Hours		Bandila	Probe	Mirada De Mujer
AXN		Las Vegas (Season 2)		The Shield 4		The Amazing Race Asia		Ripley's Believe It or Not		The 4400 (Season 2)		Sports Disaster IV		World's Most Amazing Videos		CSI: Miami (Season 4)		CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (Season 6)	
bTV	NBA Jam Local	TV Shopping		EUROLeague Panathinaikos vs. Efes			NBA Live	NBA: Rockets @ Pacers					NBA Live	NBA Fantasy Hoops	NBA Bucks @ Spurs				
Cartoon Network																	Aqua Teen Hunger Force		
Cinema One		Halimaw Sa Banga				Bulaklak Ng Maynila				Kasal-Kasalan			Persona	Dekada 70 (8:15 PM)				My First Romance	
Cinemax		Housesitter (3:15 PM)				Escape From Alcatraz				Revenge Of The Ninja				Runaway Train				Dawn Of The Dead	
CNN		Business International		World News	World Sport	Larry King Live		Business International	World Sport	World News Asia		World News	World Sport	World News Asia	World News Asia	Your World Today			
Crime/Suspense		Bones		Law and Order: Special Victims Unit + 24		Profiler		City Confidential		Law and Order		Law and Order: Special Victims Unit + 24		Training Day				Law Firm + Revelations	
Discovery Channel	Moon Machines	Perfect Disaster		American Chopper		King Tut's Mystery Tomb Opened		Man Made Marvels		Wild Discovery		Hour China		Spear Of Jesus		A Haunting		Blueprint For Disaster	
Disney Channel	Mr. Bean: The Animated Series	Totally Spies	Art Attack/Unfakeable Bunny	Mickey Mouseworks	Lilo & Stitch	Emperor's New School	Totally Spies	Kim Possible	Mr. Bean: The Animated Series	That's So Raven	Wonderful World Of Disney			American Dragon	Kim Possible	Buzz On Maggie	Totally Spies	Wonderful World Of Disney	
ESPN		NFL's Greatest Moments		Asian Cup Table Tennis '06				English Premier Football League				Ten Seasons: A Decade of Great		Sportscenter Asia	NBA Fastbreak	Motorsport Asia	Classic Boxing: Archie Moore vs Durelle		Sportscenter Asia
ETC		America's Next Top Model 5		Change of Heart	Elimidate	Blind Date	Fifth Wheel	Seinfeld	Ambush Makeover	The Tyra Banks Show		Veronica Mars Season 2		Beauty And The Geek		Entertainment Tonight	The Insider	The Tonight Show With Jay Leno	
ETC 2nd Avenue		Starting Over		The Maury Povich Show		The Jerry Springer Show		Dr. Phil		NBC Nightly News	The Inside Edition	The Ellen (Degeneres) Show		Wheel Of Fortune	Jeopardy	Cold Turkey 2		NBC Nightly News	The Inside Edition
Fox News		Hannity & Colmes		On The Record With Greta Van Susteren		The O'Reilly Factor		Your World With Neil Cavuto		Fox & Friends						Fox News Live			
GMA 7	Makita Ka Lang Muli	Kapuso Movie Festival				Ghost Fighter	Jewel In The Palace		24 Oras	Captain Barbell	Atlantika	StarStruck: The Next Level	Bakekang	A Rosy Life (9:15 PM)		Nuts Entertainment			Saksi
Hallmark Channel				Judging Amy		Just Cause		McLeod's Daughters		Strong Medicine		Family Law		Judging Amy		MacBeth			
HBO				Going Ape!			Love Walked In			Bridget Jones: The Edge Of Reason				Heart And Souls				The Saint	
Hero TV	Wild Cats	Sunny Pig	Inuyasha III	Mirmo de Pon	Saiyuki Reload	Naruto	Monkey Turn	Gundam Seed Destiny	Full Metal Panic	Galaxy Angels	Voltes V Evolution	Inuyasha III	Mirmo de Pon	Astroboy	Three-Eyed One	Naruto	Gosaurer	Wild Cats	Yu-Gi-Oh GX
IBC 13		EZ Shop				Home Shopping Network	IBC Express Balita	New Life Shopping Network		EBC Earth Files		Japan Video Topics: Ams		Travel Philippines	Good Take	Up Close & Personal	IBC News Tonite		
JackTV		Raw				Cheat	Filter	Afterburn		Mad TV		That 70s Show	Arrested Development	Last Comic Standing		The Daily Show With Jon Stewart	Chappelle's Show	The Late Show David Letterman	
Lifestyle Network		30 Minute Meals	Sweet Dreams	Rachel Ray		Smart Solutions	DIY: Crafts	Food Network Special		Martha		Style Star	Fashion Police	Rachel Ray		Isaac		Fine Living Special	
MTV Philippines		MTV Screen	VH1 Presents: Heavy: The Story of Metal pt3		Yo Momma	Score	MTV Hits		Rockista on MTV	Get Spotted	MTV Screen	TRL		Yo Momma	Score	My Super Sweet 16	Homecoming	VH1 Presents: Heavy: The Story of Metal Final	
MYX		Rock MYX	My MYX	Mellow MYX	Urban MYX	Take 5	MYXlog	MYX Firsts	Star MYX	OPM MYX	Pop MYX	MYX Daily Top Ten		MYX Live!		D'yan Banda	My MYX	MYX Backtrax	MYXlog
National Geographic	Monkey Business	Nat'l Geographic Specials				Planet Wild S3		Top 5		Nat'l Geographic Specials				Top Gun Week				Secret Bible	
NBN					Diyos Ko, Mahal Mo Ba Sila?	Teledyaryo W/ Ray Langit & Angelique Lazo		4th Cycling Search	The Final Say...ChaCha			Teledyaryo Final Edition		World Pool Championship					
Net 25	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	In Focus	Euromaxx	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Pagbubuyag		News Bai (Live)		OpenLine Live	Kapatid Sa Hanapbuhay	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Tamang Daan		World Report	In Focus	DWTV Journal News	Euromaxx
Nickelodeon	Chalkzone	The Fairly Odd Parents	SpongeBob SquarePants	Naturally Sadie	Romeo	SpongeBob SquarePants	My Life As A Teenage Robot	Danny Phantom	The Adventures Jimmy Neutron	The Fairly Odd Parents	Drake & Josh	Unfabulous	SpongeBob SquarePants	The Fairly Odd Parents	All That	Romeo	As Told By Ginger	My Dad The Rock Star	
PBO			Tatlong Anak, Isang Ama				Despedida				Kuya Kong Siga				Mumbaki				Nakaw na Sandali
Qtv	Pawnshop No. 8	Samurai X	Hikaru No Go	The Prince Of Tennis	MMS (My Music Station)		Moms		Winter Sonata	Irene	Emperor Of The Sea	Takeshi's Castle	Now Na!		News On Q	Balikbayan		Irene	Women Of Worth
RPN 9	TV Shopping	Real Lives, Real People		Roundtable Discussion	Mr. Fighting	RPN Aksyon Balita		Complete Savages	Jake In Progress	Iron Chef		Summerland		Extreme Makeover: Home Edition		Newswatch Now	Cerge For Truth		Kerygma
SBN 21								Sony Music Video				Oras Ng Himala		Oras na Katotohanan		Sony Music Video		Sony Music Video	
Solar Sports						FIVB Acapulco-M		Billiards: US 9 Ball		Sagupaan	Bikini Destination	ECW		Undisputed		Sportsdesk		Poker Heaven	
Star Movies			Baywatch: Hawaiian Wedding			An Unfinished Life				Raising Helen (8:55 PM)				Air Force Two			The East And The Furious		
Star World		The Bold & The Beautiful		General Hospital		Desire Table For Three		The Simpsons	Malcolm In The Middle	Star News Asia	Seinfeld	Ed		Grey's Anatomy		Desire Table For Three		Seinfeld	Ed
Studio 23		Rock MYX	My MYX	Mellow MYX	Urban MYX	Take 5	MYXlog	Blog	Pinoy Dream Academy	Wazzup Wazzup	CSI	Las Vegas (8:15 PM)		It's A Guy Thing		News Central	Oprah (10:45PM)		MYXlog
UnTV				KNC Show	Kakampi Mo Ang Batas		Kaka at Claire Kaagapay N'yo		Public Hearing	Make My Day		Ang Dating Daan (8:15 PM)							

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Form a group of 3 and register within 15 days. Only 1 person out of 3 needs to register. The other 2 simply have to join. 'Pag naka-join na ang 3rd member, officially registered na ang group! May 10% discount na kayo sa Unlimited Services and Sulit Calls. At may raffle entries pang makukuha with every load. When the group reaches a total load top-up of ₱750 within 30 days, each member gets 20% discount on all Unlimited Services and Sulit Calls purchases the following month.

How to start a group:

Text "REG<space>first name/last name/address" and send to 333.
Ex. "REG Mark/Bernal/29th floor Galleria Corporate Center" send to 333

Sun will reply and assign a group name na pwedeng ipadala sa mga friends na gustong maki-join.

See posters and flyers for details on purchasing discounted load.

How to join a group:

Text "JOIN<space>group name/first name/last name/address" and send to 333.
Ex. "Join markb9221234567/Darvin/Sy Su/8747 Paseo de Roxas Ave. Makati" send to 333

Group members must use the assigned name na pinadala ng Sun Cellular sa 1st group member.

How to join the RAFFLE:

Simply load any of the following Sun Cellular prepaid products para makakuha ng electronic raffle entries:

1. Physical regular load
2. Physical unlimited call cards
3. Physical special cards
4. Dealer vouchers
5. Xpress Load regular reload
6. Xpress Load unlimited reload
7. Docking Station reload
8. IDD call card

Raffle entry accumulation table:

ACTIVITIES	NUMBER OF RAFFLE COUPONS EARNED
Every ₱15.00 purchase	1
When group loads ₱750 within 30 days	10
2nd consecutive month group loads ₱750 within 30 days	20
3rd consecutive month group loads ₱750 within 30 days	30

For more info, call the Sun Hotline 395-8000 or visit www.suncellular.com.ph. See posters and flyers for more details. Promo period: Oct. 23, 2006-Jan.28, 2007.

Prizes:

MINOR ITEMS	QTY	# OF GROUP WINNERS	DRAW DATE
Robinsons ₱500 Gift Certificate	90	30	Weekly
24/7 Call & Text Unlimited 7 days	120	40	Weekly
24/7 Text Unlimited 7 days	150	50	Weekly
MAJOR ITEMS	**QTY**	**# OF GROUP WINNERS**	**DRAW DATE**
iPod Nano 1G	9	3	Nov 14
Philips DVD Player DVP-5965	9	3	Nov 21
iPod Nano 4G	9	3	Nov 28
Canon Powershot A 430 Digital Camera	9	3	Dec 5
Sony Ericsson K790i Cellphone	6	2	Dec 12
Sony Ericsson P990i Cellphone	6	2	Dec 19
Canon Mini DV Camcorder (Elura 85)	6	2	Dec 26
IBM Thinkcenter A52-PC	6	2	Jan 2
Samsung LCD 32" wide screen TV	6	2	Jan 9
Samsung LCD 40" w/Home Theatre System	3	1	Jan 16
Mazda3 1.6L S	3	1	Jan 23
₱1 Million	3	1	Jan 30

*20% tax for prizes exceeding ₱10,000.00 shall be shouldered by Digitel Mobile Philippines Inc.

Prizes shown may vary from actual units.

Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 4182, Series of 2006.

IN THIS ISSUE

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- **Inflation seen slowing** down further in 2007 /B7

Website: www.inq7money.net

BUSINESS

Editor **Raul O. Marcelo** • *Assistant Editor* **Corrie S. Narisma**

Text us your feedback: inquirer biz name/age/city/message to 2207 (Globe) or 283 (Smart) **E-mail:** business@inquirer.com.ph

Zest-O in talks to buy Dubai-based firm

Overseas expansion will also include China, Indonesia

By Doris C. Dumlao

LOCAL BEVERAGE MANUFACTURER ZEST-O CORP. IS IN TALKS to buy out Dubai-based Arab Beverages Establishments (ABE), the world's biggest producer of fruit juices in doypack pouches similar to the packaging of the Zest-O brand.

Zest-O chair Alfredo Yao said his company was in exclusive negotiations for the purchase of ABE and that he was set to leave for Dubai after Christmas to wrap up discussions on the acquisition.

ABE produces the Capri-Sonne Fruit Juice under license from Capri-Sun AG Switzerland.

"Their contract will expire next year so they're looking for another group to continue the operations," Yao said, noting that his company had already conducted a due-diligence audit on the Dubai company.

The acquisition is part of Zest-O's bid to go global, Yao said. The Philippine company is likewise expanding in the fast-growing Asian region, particularly in China, Indonesia and Vietnam.

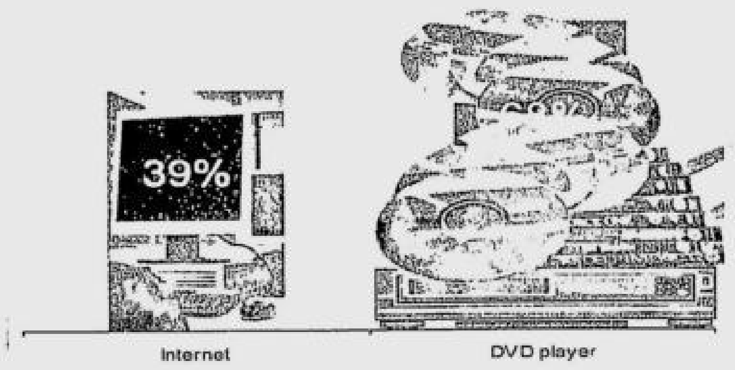
ZEST-O IN TALKS/ B2

INQUIRER MONITOR

Figures that matter in our nation's life

More Metro Manilans have DVD players than Internet access

Metro Manilans between 15 and 64 years who own DVD players nearly double the percentage of those who have access to the internet.



Source:Synovate Media Atlas Survey, 2006
Kate Pedroso Inquirer Research

Gov't borrowings in first 11 months hit ₱592B

By Michelle V. Remo

WITH A DECLINING BUDGET DEFICIT, the national government's borrowings from January to November dropped slightly from a year ago.

Documents from the Department of Finance showed that the government borrowed P592.39 billion in the first 11 months of the year, or 0.47-percent lower than the P595.21 billion in the same period last year.

Borrowings by the national government are used to cover expenditure requirements that could not be financed by its revenue collection and to pay off maturing obligations.

Of the P592.39 billion in borrowings for the 11 months, P491.6 billion were used to pay foreign and local liabilities, with the balance for the government's operations.

The amount spent for paying maturing obligations was 37 percent higher than the P358.06 billion recorded in January to November last year. The increase was consistent with the government's aim of accelerating its debt reduction program.

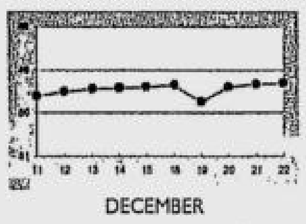
Of the total borrowings in the 11-month period, foreign obligations accounted for P244.82 billion and domestic borrowings accounted for the bigger share of P347.57 billion.

Foreign borrowings are done either through the flotation of sovereign bonds in the international capital market or securing official development assistance (ODA) loans from multilateral and bilateral agencies.

GOV'T/ B2

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES



₱49.28 = $1

As of 5 p.m., Dec. 22, 2006

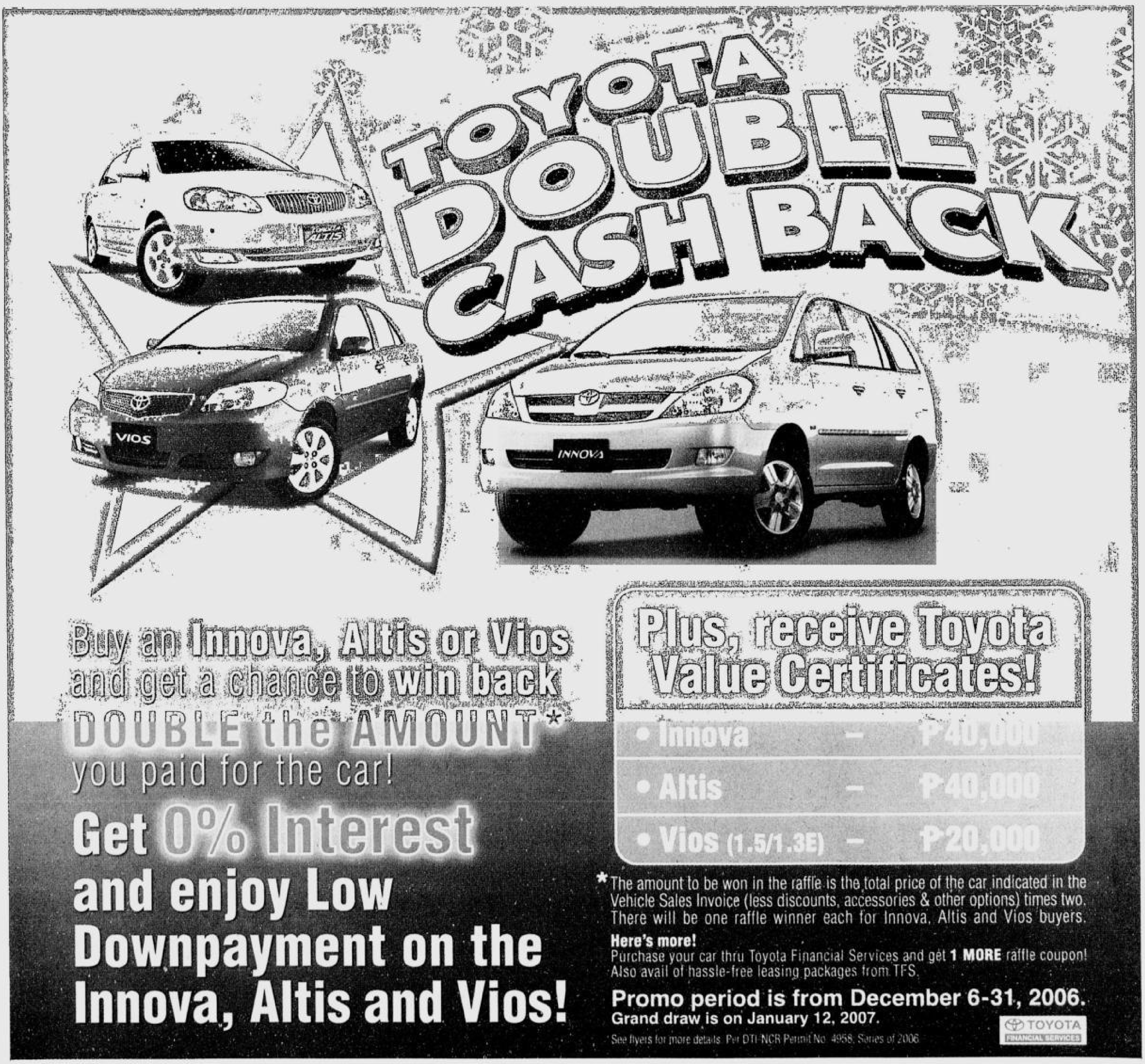
STOCK MARKET

Stocks seen to rise

ANALYSTS REMAIN OPTIMISTIC THAT THE stock market will continue its bull run until the end of the year, mainly due to the traditional Yuletide "window dressing," despite the holiday-shortened trading week.

Window dressing refers to the selling of weak performing stocks by money managers just before the end of each reporting quarter so that a particular portfolio does not appear to be heavy on these types of stocks. This is accompanied by buying strong performing stocks.

"But we should see more positioning (this) week even when most investors are on a holiday break," said Astro del Castillo, managing director of investment firm First Grade Holdings. "We're optimistic about a Santa Claus rally. It may not be as spectacular as (last) week's, but the reindeers will keep running."



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- Altis – ₱40,000
- Vios (1.5/1.3E) – ₱20,000

*The amount to be won in the raffle is the total price of the car indicated in the Vehicle Sales Invoice (less discounts, accessories & other options) times two. There will be one raffle winner each for Innova, Altis and Vios buyers.

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RLC eyes large tracts of gov't land for acquisition, development

10-hectare BCDA property in Fort Boni eyed

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

PROPERTY FIRM ROBINSONS LAND CORP. IS interested in acquiring large tracts of land being disposed of by the government or by other private companies in line with its efforts to develop more mixed use communities, RLC president Frederick Go said.

For one, Go said RLC was interested in the more than 10-hectare property of the Bases Conversion Development Authority in the northern part of Forth Bonifacio in Taguig.

He said the government had yet to announce the bidding schedule for this property and RLC believed it might take six months before the property would be offered for sale. "We are very interested in any large tracks of land that we can buy or develop under possible joint ventures with the land owners," he said.

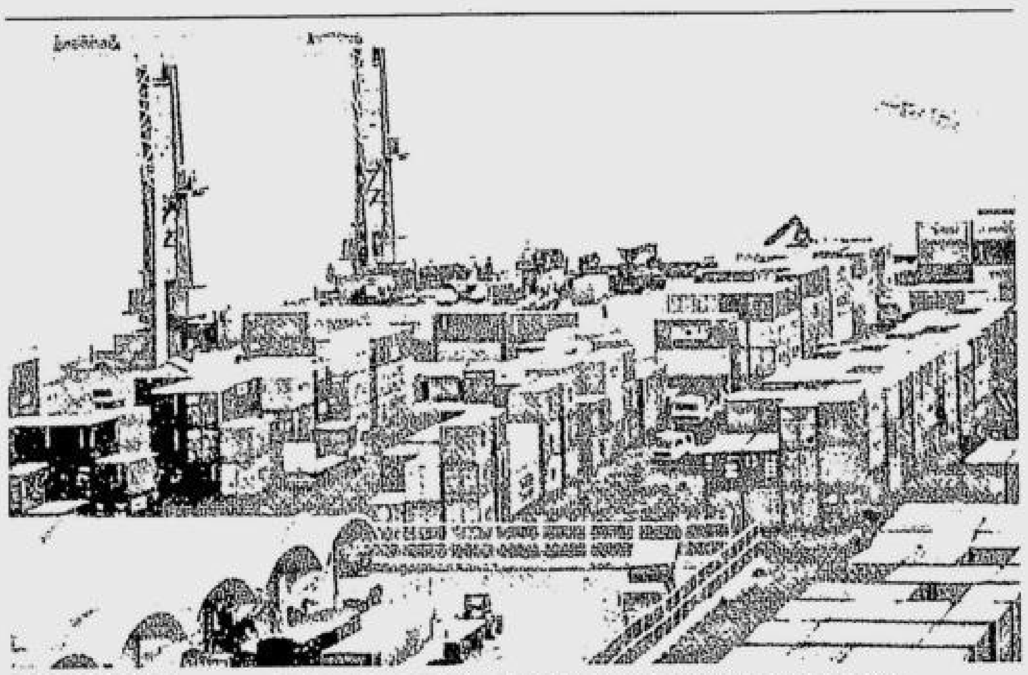
To finance its acquisitions, Go said RLC would use a combination of debt and equity.

RLC is the country's largest business process outsourcing (BPO) lessor with 116,000 square meters of leasable BPO space. It plans to construct another 80,000 square meters of leasable space in the next 18 months. It is also the second largest mall developer and one of the leading residential builders in the country.

RLC earlier said it was setting aside as much as P8 billion for projects that would be implemented next year to take advantage of the booming office space and residential market.

These projects include a third tower for Cybergate Center in Mandaluyong, which will offer spaces to BPO companies. Cybergate Tower 3, which will have about 43,000 square meters of leasable space, will have 37 floors. It is targeted for completion by the first quarter of 2008.

RLC is also embarking on the construction of another office building in Quezon City. RLC's budget will also be earmarked for ongoing projects such as the 38-story Fifth Avenue Place residential condominium in Fort Bonifacio, the 30-story Gateway Garden Ridge in Mandaluyong, One, Two and Three Adriatico Place in Ermita, Manila, McKinley Park condominium in Fort Bonifacio, its townhouse project Otis 888 Residences in Paco, Manila, and its Woodsville Viverde Mansions in Parañaque.



EXPECTED US economic slowdown seen to dampen growth of electronics exports

Philexport expects slower export growth next year

By Ronnel W. Domingo

EXPORT EARNINGS FOR THIS YEAR ARE EXpected to exceed the growth forecast of 10 percent, but the continued strengthening of the peso and the expected softening of markets worldwide could mean slower growth in 2007, according to the Philippine Exporters Confederation.

Specifically, the projected cooling of the United States economy next year is seen to dampen the growth of electronics exports, which remain the country's top dollar earner.

Philexport said data from the Semiconductor and Electronics Industry of the Philippines had shown electronics exports growth forecast of only 5 percent to 10 percent for 2007.

Electronics and semiconductors made up close to 75 percent of the country's total export earnings of $39.35 billion from January to October 2006.

By yearend, the total is seen to reach between $47 billion and $48 billion, which translates to an overall export growth of between 13 percent and 15 percent.

Philexport president Sergio R. Ortiz-Luis Jr. said that with the electronics industry forecasting a high-end growth target of only 10 percent, other export sectors might not be able to pull the growth rate further up.

Ortiz-Luis explained that the strengthening peso had hit indigenous exports the hardest, managing to meet their 2006 targets with very slim margins.

He was referring to goods made mainly of domestic raw materials such as processed and fresh food, handicrafts, furniture, holiday decors and housewares.

The Philexport chief said government forecasters had pinned their hopes on the continued growth in exports plus hefty dollar remittances from overseas Filipino workers as the main driver of sustained economic growth next year.

If the targets of the main players fall short of government forecasts, the overall economic growth next year may turn out to be overoptimistic, he said.

"(It would be good if we) still make the 10-percent growth target next year," Ortiz-Luis explained. "But at the rate the peso keeps on strengthening, I doubt if the indigenous exports can meet their targets this time."

"Besides, it is hard to project the behavior of the (demand trends) of our main trading partners, particularly the United States," he said.

Floundering deal weighs heavily on Surigao

By Daxim L. Lucas

(Second of two parts)

SPECIAL REPORT

NONOC ISLAND IS LOCATED five kilometers off Surigao City in northeastern Mindanao, within the 250,000-hectare Surigao Mineral Reservation Area—one of the richest mining zones in the country.

This fact is not lost on the impoverished inhabitants of the island and the local government authorities.

"Surigao is still dependent on IRA (internal revenue allotment) from the national government at 70-30," said Surigao City Mayor Alfonso S. Casura in an interview. "This mining project is very important for us."

He said the city and the province continued to rely heavily on what were practically doleouts from the central government in Manila because of their relatively weak economy.

But such was not always the case. The mayor remembers a time when business in the city and the adjoining areas bustled with life because of all the nickel mining activity on Nonoc Island.

CASURA

Need for own industry

Nowadays, business activity in Surigao, especially trading, is almost at a standstill. The entire province has been trying to reposition itself, but with limited success, as a tourist destination.

"We really need [the revival of mining operations in] Nonoc because that will reduce our dependence on IRA to 50-50," he explained.

It is difficult not to be excited about the benefits that the project will bring to the area. In terms of jobs generated, the argument is compelling.

Surigao del Norte Gov. Robert Lyndon S. Barbers said the reactivation of mining and refinery activities would create at least 5,000 jobs on the impoverished island.

"Even at the minimum wage, that will create P25 million in salaries each month," he said, adding that the amount is no laughing matter in an underdeveloped province like his.

However, ongoing negotiations between Chinese investors, the Philippine government and Philnico Industrial Corp. have all but failed, with talks on how much each party will get at the end of the day reaching an impasse. Last week, Jinchuan Nonferrous Metals Corp. offered the government a 15-percent stake in the restructured company plus a $45-million upfront payment in exchange for its $300-million claim over Philnico.

Philnico, for its part, is reportedly being offered a similar minority stake in the firm, the size of which is probably the bone of contention between parties.

Failed talks

"Their offer is unreasonable," Philnico president Evaristo Narvaez Jr. said in a press conference last week. He said his group wanted Jinchuan to lay their cards on the negotiating table.

"We want to get it straight from them if they're serious or not," he said.

The Philnico chief declined to reveal details of the negotiations, but said the disagreement centered on how the revitalized firm's operations will be structured.

He said some proposals called for the bulk of the profits from the mining operations to be booked in China, leaving the firm's Philippine operations largely unprofitable. Such a structure, he explained, would enrich the Chinese partners while leaving only crumbs for the Filipino partners.

Understandably, the government wants a deal forged as it has been the subject of no less than three letters of intent and memoranda between President Macapagal-Arroyo and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.

Last week, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri told reporters that negotiations had hit a wall because Philnico was demanding a bigger slice of the pie—something Narvaez denies.

"The issue is not valuation," he said. "We just want to protect the interests of all the stakeholders involved."

Unless either of the parties budge, however, it is possible that the deal will fall through, given that Chinese investors have signaled their intent to buttress their bargaining position by conducting yet another feasibility study on the project.

The waiting continues

For the people of Nonoc, the delays and the false hopes for the revival of the mining industry have become par for the course over the last 20 years.

Philnico community relations officer Chanito L. Ouano—who has left for the Middle East thrice before to work in the oil industry—is willing to bet his future on the reopening of the mines, notwithstanding the frustration of waiting for developments beyond his control.

"I have waited for 20 years," he said. "I am willing to wait for 20 more."

At the rate the negotiations are deteriorating, his resolve may soon be put to the test. But the ongoing boom of the global mining industry—and the potential profits to be reaped from it—will not wait as long.

Zest-O in talks to buy Dubai-based firm

From page B1

He said Zest-O would spend "a few billions" for its globalization program. It would not be the firm's first overseas acquisition, having earlier purchased another beverage company in China.

"With this globalization going on, the world is now without borders. You have to go out now, unlike before when there were too many barriers," Yao said.

ABE was founded in 1984. Aside from producing Capri Sonne, it distributes Active O2, 'V' Energy Drink and Biophar Honey in the United Arab Emirates market.

Zest-O is the world's second biggest producer of natural fruit juice concentrate in doypacks next to Capri Sonne, with flavors in orange, strawberry, pineapple, guyabano, mango, mango-orange, apple, grape, mango-calamansi, mango-lemonlime and calamansi. The company also produces the bottled iced tea brand One.

In Dubai, ABE has the capacity to produce at least 20,000 packets an hour.

The Yaos saw the opportunity to gain a formidable foothold in the Arab market by making this acquisition in Dubai. The potential purchase will be paid using internal cash plus some bank loans.

Zest-O is also making inroads into the Indonesian market.

"We're putting up a plant there but in the meantime, we're exporting from here based on the needs of the Indonesian market," he said.

He said there was a trend among the younger market to shift to healthier beverages like juice and iced tea but not enough to create a dent in the carbonated drink business.

"Within the industry, for the new entrants, the actual value of sales was not likely to be more than P5 billion. Partially it created a new market, and partially gobbled up some share from the carbonated drinks," he said.

Zest-O is expected to post a double-digit growth in business volume this year, he said.

Yao said at least two big companies had offered to buy out Zest-O. "But our stockholders don't have plans to sell out."

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of December 22, 2006)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
FINANCIAL					
BANKS					
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	47.5	47.5	46.5	47	1,837,700
Bank of the Phil. Islands	62	62.5	61.5	62.5	2,481,500
China Banking Corp.	695	695	695	695	3,000
Citystate Savings Bank	19	19	19	19	400
Export and Ind. Bank A	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.47	2,290,000
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	84.5	84.5	84	84	132,700
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	51	51	50.5	51	1,312,500
Philippine National Bank	44	44	43.5	44	85,200
Phil. Savings Bank	48	48	48	48	2,000
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	26	26	25.5	25.5	109,000
Security Bank Corp.	66	66	66	66	146,200
Union Bank of the Phil.	49	49	49	49	1,400
OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS					
Atr Kimeng Fin. Corp.	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.96	23,000
Bankard Inc.	0.78	0.78	0.75	0.75	160,000
Citiseconline.Com Inc.	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.5	250,000
First Metro Invest. Corp	30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5	2,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1650	1650	1650	1650	350
Ivantage Corp.	1.54	1.6	1.54	1.6	4,277,000
INDUSTRIAL					
ELECTRICITY, ENERGY, POWER & WATER					
PNOC Energy Dev. Corp.	4.5	4.55	4.45	4.45	54,204,000
First Gen Corp.	55	55	54	54.5	1,362,600
First Phil Hldgs Corp	62.5	63.5	62.5	63	1,013,600
Manila Electric Co. A	54	54.5	53.5	54	210,000
Manila Electric Co. B	54	54.5	54	54.5	551,200
Manila Water Co. Inc.	9.5	9.5	9.4	9.5	4,162,000
Petron Corp.	4.1	4.15	4.1	4.1	3,780,000
East Asia Power Res. Corp	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	200,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	1.1	1.12	1.1	1.12	167,000
FOOD, BEVERAGE & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.6	23,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	21	21	21	21	10,800
Jollibee Foods Corp.	42	42	41.5	42	369,000
RFM Corp.	1	1	1	1	200,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	2.8	3.05	2.75	2.75	1,780,000
San Miguel Corp. A	67	67	66.5	67	44,300
San Miguel Corp. B	74.5	74.5	74	74	117,700
Alliance Tuna Int'l. Inc	2.18	2.18	2.08	2.1	533,000
Universal Robina Corp	18.75	18.75	18.75	18.75	5,211,200
CONSTRUCTION, INFRASTRUCTURE & ALLIED SERVICES					
Southeast Asian Cement	1.04	1.04	1	1	12,677,000
Engineering Equip. Inc.	3.15	3.2	3.15	3.15	811,000
Fortune Cement Corp.	2.65	2.65	2.65	2.65	4,000
Holcim Philippines Inc.	7.6	7.6	7.5	7.5	1,093,000
Phil Nat'l Const. Corp.	6.3	6.4	6.3	6.4	42,000
Republic Cement Corp.	3.95	3.95	3.9	3.9	185,000
CHEMICALS					
Chemrez Technologies Inc.	5.3	5.4	5.2	5.3	2,746,000
Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	0.62	0.62	0.62	0.62	10,000
DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS					
Geograce Res. Phil. Inc.	0.71	0.72	0.7	0.71	25,540,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.215	0.215	0.185	0.2	34,040,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.0085	0.0085	0.008	0.008	70,000,000
Ayala Corp.	515	540	510	540	436,270
Alsons Cons. Res. Inc.	0.68	0.74	0.67	0.67	5,450,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	6.9	7	6.9	6.9	632,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.0625	0.0625	0.06	0.06	44,400,000
A. Soriano Corp.	2.85	2.85	2.85	2.85	322,000
Apc Group Inc.	0.39	0.39	0.37	0.37	6,920,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	10,000,000
Anglo Phil Holdings Corp.	1.08	1.16	1.08	1.14	13,031,000
Aln Holdings Inc.	1.82	1.82	1.82	1.82	80,000
Baguio Gold Holdings Corp	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.3	83,000
Balabac Resources & Hldgs	1.14	1.14	1.1	1.1	27,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc	9.3	9.3	9.3	9.3	55,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	2.22	2.22	2.2	2.2	2,294,000
Dmci Holdings Inc.	5.9	6	5.8	5.8	2,947,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	3.55	3.55	3.55	3.55	574,000
Forum Pacific Inc.	0.13	0.17	0.13	0.17	520,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	10	10.5	10	10.5	3,767,000
Keppel Holdings B	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	97,000
Mabuhay Holdings Corp.	0.34	0.34	0.34	0.34	20,000
Magnum Holdings Inc	4	4.1	3.9	3.95	73,000
Multitech Inv. Corp.	1.6	1.6	1.54	1.58	1,703,000
Pacifica	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	3,000,000
Prime Orion Phils. Inc.	0.2	0.205	0.19	0.19	1,500,000
Prime Media Holdings Inc.	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	60,000
Republic Glass Hldg. Corp	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	30,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.155	0.155	0.155	0.155	2,120,000
Sm Investments Corp.	305	310	305	310	85,370
South China Resources Inc	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	190,000
Unioil Res. & Holdings Co	0.32	0.32	0.29	0.29	13,010,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	15.25	15.25	15.25	15.25	1,408,400
Araneta Properties Inc.	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	50,000
Belle Corp.	1.12	1.12	1.1	1.12	643,000
A Brown Company Inc.	1.66	1.66	1.56	1.6	506,000
Cityland Development Corp	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.6	10,000
Cebu Holdings Inc	3.2	3.25	3.15	3.15	216,000
C & P Homes Inc.	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	176,000
Cebu Prop. Vent. A	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	6,000
Cebu Prop. Vent B	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	50,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.32	0.32	0.31	0.31	7,310,000
Elb Realty Developers Inc	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	90,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.54	0.54	0.53	0.54	3,670,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.07	0.07	0.0625	0.0625	3,000,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	2	2	1.98	2	6,482,000
Gotesco Land Inc.	0.145	0.145	0.145	0.145	200,000
Gotesco Land Inc.B	0.145	0.16	0.135	0.135	870,000
Highlands Prime Inc.	2.5	2.9	2.5	2.9	160,000
Interport Res.	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	8,000,000
Interport Res. B	0.0085	0.009	0.0085	0.009	35,000,000
Keppel Phils. Prop. Inc.	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	2,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.48	0.48	0.45	0.45	1,070,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.64	0.64	0.63	0.64	1,000,000
Megaworld Corp.	2.3	2.3	2.26	2.28	10,288,000
Metro Pacific Inv. Corp.	5.1	6.4	5.1	5.4	2,683,000
Mrc Allied Ind. Inc.	0.39	0.4	0.38	0.38	1,750,000
Robinsons Land Corp.	15.5	15.5	15.25	15.25	707,300
Phil Realty and Holdings	0.68	0.68	0.65	0.66	11,020,000
Sm Development Corp.	2.5	2.55	2.5	2.5	800,000
Sm Prime Holdings Inc.	10	10.25	10	10.25	4,604,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.125	0.125	0.11	0.11	6,880,000
SERVICE					
MEDIA					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp	21	21	20.5	20.75	37,300
TELECOMMUNICATIONS					
Digital Telecom Phils Inc	1.92	1.94	1.88	1.92	11,080,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	1240	1240	1230	1230	8,110
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	6.6	6.6	6.5	6.6	4,052,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	2390	2395	2325	2325	223,260
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY					
Boulevard Holdings Inc.	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	1,470,000
Imperial Res.	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	23,200,000
Ionics Inc.	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	255,000
Ipvg Corp.	4.1	4.1	3.95	3.95	949,000
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.055	0.055	0.055	0.055	500,000
Ism Communications Corp.	0.0575	0.06	0.0575	0.06	10,100,000
Transpacific Broadband	4.15	4.15	2.8	2.8	2,933,000
Philweb Corp.	0.031	0.032	0.03	0.032	77,100,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.1	16,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	19	19.75	19	19.75	225,000
Lorenzo Shipping Corp.	1.28	1.28	1.26	1.26	81,000
HOTEL & LEISURE					
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	2.08	2.08	2.06	2.08	330,000
Philippine Racing Club	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	100,000
EDUCATION					
Centro Escolar University	9	9	9	9	6,000
Ipeople Inc.	3.05	3.05	3.05	3.05	336,000
DIVERSIFIED SERVICES					
Macroasia Corp.	2.12	2.12	2.08	2.08	377,000
Paxys Inc.	19	19.5	19	19.5	1,005,900
MINING					
Apex Mining Co. Inc. A	5.9	5.9	5.8	5.8	196,000
Apex Mining Co. Inc B	6	6	6	6	210,000
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.012	0.012	0.011	0.011	125,600,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	9.9	10	9.6	9.7	2,395,000
Dizon Copper Silver Mines	3.4	4	2.95	3.2	2,855,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	5,170,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.28	0.28	0.27	0.27	5,190,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.023	0.023	0.022	0.023	632,100,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.026	0.026	0.025	0.026	240,000,000
Omico Corp.	0.013	0.013	0.012	0.012	848,300,000
Philex Mining Corp.	4.1	4.1	3.95	4	9,747,000
Semirara Mining Corp.	18.75	18.75	18.75	18.75	92,300
United Paragon Mining Co.	0.75	0.75	0.72	0.75	2,180,000
Vulcan Ind'l	1.72	1.72	1.62	1.64	5,593,000
OIL					
Basic Petroleum Corp.	0.28	0.29	0.28	0.29	700,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	87,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	21,600,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	1	1	1	1	900,000
The Philodrill Corp. B	1	1	1	1	113,000
Petroenergy Res. Corp.	10	10	10	10	118,000

CURRENCIES

December 22, 2006 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.758783	1.000000	49.4220
Japan	Yen	0.006409	0.008446	0.4174
United Kingdom	Pound	1.491312	1.965400	97.1340
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.097603	0.128631	6.3572
Switzerland	Franc	0.623333	0.821490	40.5997
Canada	Dollar	0.660443	0.870398	43.0168
Singapore	Dollar	0.493004	0.649730	32.1110
Australia	Dollar	0.596621	0.786287	38.8599
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.012847	2.652731	131.1033
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.202337	0.266660	13.1789
Brunei	Dollar	0.491408	0.647626	32.0070
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000083	0.000110	0.0054
Thailand	Baht	0.021030	0.027716	1.3698
UAE	Dirham	0.206601	0.272279	13.4566
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.317900	65.1333
Korea	Won	0.000819	0.001080	0.0534
China	Yuan**	0.097091	0.127956	6.3238
Argentina	Peso	0.248618	0.327654	16.1933
Brazil	Real	0.351940	0.463822	22.9230
Denmark	Kroner	0.134182	0.176838	8.7397
India	Rupee	0.017013	0.022422	1.1081
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.214224	0.282326	13.9531
Mexico	New Peso	0.070102	0.092387	4.5660
New Zealand	Dollar	0.528106	0.695991	34.3973
South Africa	Rand	0.108852	0.143456	7.0899
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023269	0.030666	1.5156

Source: Reuters' forex closing prices as of NY Time Dec. 20, 2006
* Various banks in Bahrain as quoted in Reuters' Screen.
** Asian Time Closing Rate as of Dec. 20, 2006

DAR to offer 1.8M ha for tie-ups with private firms

Seeks to boost incomes of agrarian reform communities

By Christine A. Gaylican

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRARIAN REFORM will consolidate some 1.8 million hectares of agrarian reform lands for possible contract-growing arrangements and agribusiness ventures.

Agrarian Reform Secretary Nasser Pangandaman said that agrarian reform beneficiaries in these areas were ready with projects for agribusiness development and possible tie-ups with privately owned companies engaged in food processing.

"We are closely coordinating this project with the Department of Agriculture as they have direct access to private companies and what exactly do they need in terms of raw materials," Pangandaman said in a recent presentation to members of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI).

He said there were 2,649 agrarian reform communities (ARCs) engaged in the production of high-value crops such as sugar and coconut and staple crops rice and corn in different provinces nationwide.

These are investment opportunities and possible tie-ups with agribusiness firms are required as these ARCs need the market for their produce to provide a steady source of incomes for the farmers, Pangandaman pointed out.

"Companies engaged in the production of coffee, rubber, banana and abaca could tap our ARCs in Northern Luzon (as well as) in the Visayas and Mindanao," he added.

According to Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap, Japanese company Sumitomo Fruits Inc. recently signed up an agreement to use about 2, 000 hectares for the production of pineapples in Davao.

ARCs are much like cooperatives in that agrarian reform beneficiaries are brought together to maximize their resources, including the management of agricultural operations and embarking on entrepreneurial activities.

The DAR's role is to provide support services that would help increase productivity and income. These services may include putting up infrastructure such as irrigation facilities, farm-to-market roads and bridges, pre- and post-harvest facilities, as well as extending credit and marketing assistance.

Economist and former economic planning chief Cielito F. Habito earlier lauded the progress ARCs have made in enriching poor peoples in the provinces.

"Based on the findings of the impact studies on CARP, agrarian reform beneficiaries are now earning better compared to other farmer," Habito noted. Specifically, labor productivity among ARCs now averages P20,430 per hectare against P8,032 in regular farmlands.

Moreover, average incomes of agrarian reform beneficiaries have grown to P97,844 a year from P75,787 for non-CARP beneficiaries.

Also, a number of agrarian reform beneficiaries have become the country's new breed of entrepreneurs.

Help desk eyed to assist agri exporters

AN INTER-AGENCY AGRI-TRADE DESK will be put up early next year to assist Philippine agribusiness companies to have better and wider access to local and international markets, Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap said.

He said the marketing and trade assistance help desk would be set up in coordination with the departments of trade and industry and of foreign affairs.

"It would be one-stop center that will provide assistance to Philippine-based firms so that they would know how to tap local markets as well as how they can gear for exports," Yap said in a recent forum with officers and employees of Dole Asia Philippines.

Yap said that this would be one of the concrete measures to be taken by government agencies to enhance market linkages for companies here and abroad.

"We want to strengthen private sector partnerships in order to generate more direct investments in agribusiness," he added.

Yap added that this would complement efforts to help exporters, who are now reeling from the effects of a strengthening peso.

One such measure is to exempt exporters leaving on trade promotion trips and missions abroad from paying the travel tax.

Export Development Council (EDC) Executive Director Emmarita Mijares said that the agency has finalized its travel exemption proposal, which would become the basis for an executive order to be issued by the President.

"This exemption will be limited to official delegations and missions," Mijares said. While she admitted that the amount was small, the plan was nevertheless a symbolic gesture that the government wanted to help exporters.

Last August, Malacañang issued EO 554 directing all departments, bureaus, commissions, agencies, as well as government-owned and -controlled corporations to "eliminate the fees imposed on export-related permits and clearances, except those imposed by specific laws." *Christine A. Gaylican*

Gov't . . .

From page B1

The country's biggest sources of ODAs, which are concessional in nature and carry lower interest rates, include the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Domestic borrowings are undertaken through the issuance of treasury bills, bonds and other government securities.

In line with its intention to minimize exposure to currency volatility, the government has adopted the policy of borrowing more from domestic sources.

The drop in borrowings came with the reduction in the government's budget deficit to only P58.3 billion in January to November this year from P122 billion a year ago.

The 11-month deficit was only 47 percent of the P125-billion ceiling set by fiscal authorities for 2006.

The DOF said it expected the deficit for this year to be much lower than the ceiling. Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said the full-year deficit could be between P80 billion and P90 billion.

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Editor Cesar D. Mangawang

Globe) or 283 (Smart)

A trump card up Toyota's sleeve

THE STYLISH and high performance Toyota Blade will surely excite the local market once Toyota Motor Philippines brings the hatchback here.

By Charles E. Buban

JUST WHEN WE THOUGHT Toyota Motor Corp. would relax a bit (after all the world's second biggest automaker introduced a formidable lineup of new vehicle models this year) comes another hit potential.

The company announced last week the launch of its high-end, compact hatchback called Blade.

Powered by a 2.4-liter engine and mated to a continuously variable transmission with seven programmed "speeds" (if the driver chooses a manual transmission-like driving), the Blade was conceived by Toyota not only for easy driving but also to meet the expectations of mature car buyers who are looking for exciting, more premium products.

Toyota described the Blade as an easy-to-handle (using components of its Corolla) compact car that offers the driving performance of a luxury sedan.

Available in Japan

Although the Blade is only available in Japan at the moment (a well-equipped, four-wheel-drive version of the car will sell for 2.772 million yen or roughly P1.15 million here), local car lovers are already excited about the prospect of Toyota Motor Philippines bringing the Blade here.

Sammy Liuson, president of Wheel Gallery (which sells exotic magwheels and tires) and who also heads a group of automotive aftermarket suppliers, believes the Blade's sharp styling and aggressive front end would appeal to a lot of young Filipino car buyers who love to dress up or accessorize.

Liuson added that the Blade would also appeal to car owners who would want to create a high-performance package (for show or racing).

Indeed, the Blade features a sloping nose and trapezoidal (L-shaped) headlamps, with massive air intakes on either side of the grille.

The Blade's design is based on Toyota's design mantra "Vibrant Clarity," which expresses the company's energy and vitality, coupled with its more rational, environment-friendly vision.

Compact frame

Despite its compact frame, Toyota said the Blade fulfills the company's stringent Global Outstanding Assessment (GOA) safety guidelines ensuring that the car's structure would provide its passengers high level of protection from most types of collisions or accidents.

Toyota also revealed that it restructured the car's front seats to protect the driver and front passenger against whiplash.

These features greatly enhance the supplemental restraint systems side and curtain shield airbags and a driver's seat SRS knee airbag that come standard in the car.

Moreover, the Blade also features a pedestrian-injury-lessening body structure that further reduces injuries on pedestrians during accidents.

Driving stability

Being a high-performance hatchback, the Blade is equipped with a vehicle stability control and traction control systems that complement the Blade's front- or all-wheel drive system and significantly lessen events of skidding, spinning or rolling over during sudden or emergency maneuvers.

A newly designed suspension (including new double wishbone type in the rear) also ensures "superior cruising performance," of the Blade in the highways.

Since the Blade is sold in Japan where there is high level of environmental awareness, Toyota equipped the Blade with an Eco Drive Indicator that lights up when the vehicle is being efficiently operated to raise the driver's awareness of environmentally considerate driving and contribute to higher fuel efficiency.

Highlights of 2006

THE FORESTER comes to our mind when we hear the word "Subaru."

MY DRIFT

Andre Palma

ANOTHER HOLIDAY SEASON IS UPON US; another year is coming to a close. With the arrival of a brand-new year comes the usual time for assessment, both personal and professional. So much has come and gone in another 12 months of writing this column.

Let us look back then, ladies and gentlemen, at the year that will soon pass into memory and the cars that will define how I remember 2006.

Donne Italiane Belle

There will always be a distinct Italian flavor to the past year. A few months back saw my initiation to the Maserati marquee with a decent amount of seat time in both the Quattroporte and Coupé. Both powered by 400 horsepower, 4.2-liter V8 engines from Modena, clothed in top shelf, design studio sheet metal and complete with interiors that just scream extravagance—it is easy to see how the world-weary motoring hack can be made to grin silly.

As luck would have it, I also made the acquaintance of beautiful lady from Maranello just last week. While our tarmac tryst lasted maybe only 20 minutes, the memories from that all too short of a time will undeniably be unforgettable. Intentionally running with the windows down, the exhaust note of the F430's V8, massaged through an aftermarket Tubi system is otherworldly; there is just no better description for it. My first gallop in a prancing horse leaves me with just one New Year's wish, that it not be my last.

Heavy metal

The company name Fuji Heavy Industries may lack recall to the "everyday motorist." Nine out of 10 will likely guess that it is a Japanese manufacturing concern engaged in the production of esoteric industrial toys; big lumbering things that pack a punch. Good guess, half a point there.

There are a select, crazed few though who know, that in performance petrol-speak, that Fuji Heavy translates to Subaru. Say the word "Subaru" and it is difficult not to mutter the words "Impreza" and "Forester." Once you recite these two model names, the phrases "turbo power" and "all weather, all wheel drive" aren't far behind. These are real practical cars, for our real imperfect roads, and yes, there is a "real world" speed to them.

The people's car

If you've seen this car on the road, one just knows it is going to overpopulate our streets. With a sensible, almost K-car, two-box layout, and a price tag that is clearly value for money, its fate is sealed. Look to find Toyota Avanza's everywhere, very soon.

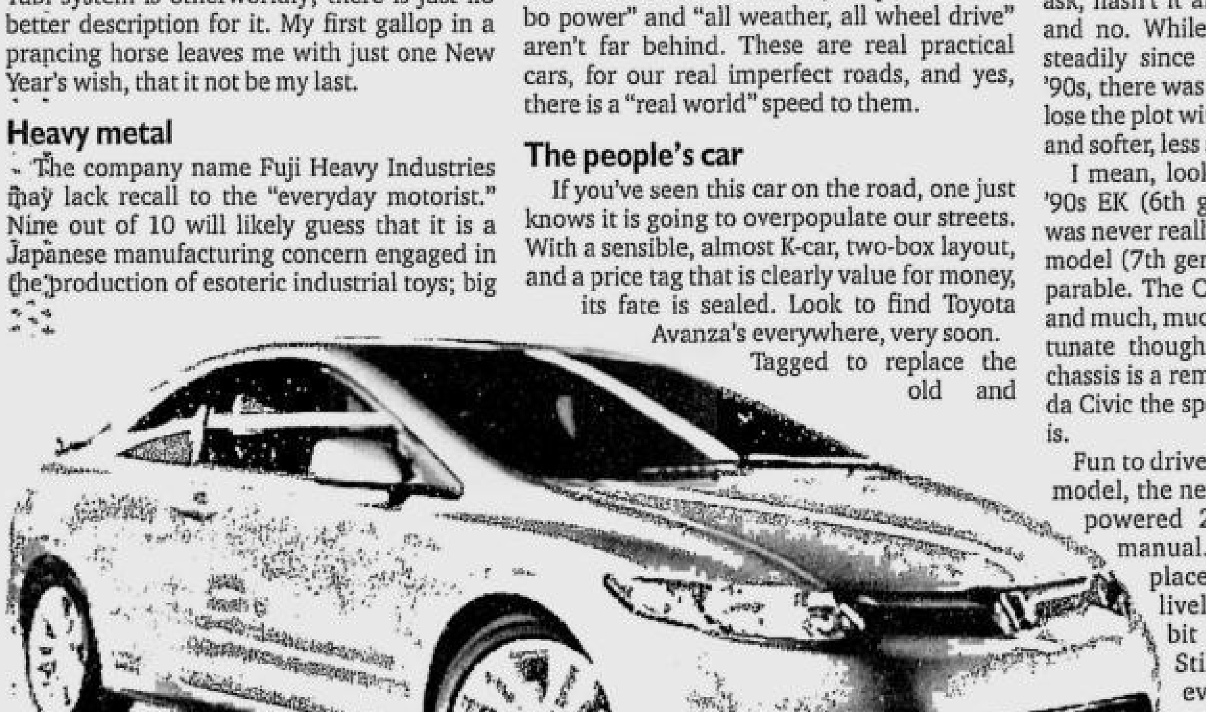
Tagged to replace the old and aging taxi and light commercial fleets across the country, this mini-MPV is predictably destined to be a bestseller. Add to that the Avanza's ability to meet the basic motoring and transport needs of the small, urban Filipino family and how can this model not become the next Corolla or Vios? Oh, those are Toyota's too aren't they? Whatever emotion this car fails to stir is more than compensated for by the sheer utility, again typical Toyota.

The return

Finally, 2006 will be the year that the Honda Civic finally made a full return to the Philippine market. Where did it go, one may ask, hasn't it always been around? Well, yes and no. While the model has been selling steadily since its introduction in the early '90s, there was a point that Honda seemed to lose the plot with the Civic model. It got softer and softer, less sharp and admittedly boring.

I mean, look, after the genius of the late '90s EK (6th generation) chassis SiR, there was never really any way that the 2001-on ES model (7th generation) could be called comparable. The Civic became older, less frantic and much, much less entertaining. We are fortunate though that the 8th generation FD chassis is a reminder of what makes the Honda Civic the sport compact sweetheart that it is.

Fun to drive in the 1.8-liter, 140-bhp base model, the new Civic is best had in the K20 powered 2.0-liter, 155-horse, 5-speed manual. Torque from the extra displacement just turns an already lively drive into something a little bit more potent and enjoyable. Still practical enough to drive every day, the bang for buck performance just seals the deal. Welcome back. It took a while but the Civic we know and love is back and hopefully, here to stay.



THE CIVIC is fun to drive in the 1.8-liter 140-bhp base model.

The little car with the heart

ON THE ROAD

Aida Sevilla-Mendoza

WITH THE HOPE AND GOODWILL STILL ENERGIZING PEOPLE two days after Christmas, I thought I would edit and rerun something I wrote eight years ago:

Once upon a time many years ago, local car assemblers produced a wide range of small, fuel-efficient cars. One of these was a Japanese four-door subcompact model with a small 1.1-liter engine.

When this model was still new on the market, its cute appearance and low fuel consumption attracted many buyers. There were so many units coming off the assembly line, in fact, that it was possible one of them would be different from all the others. Not externally, but in the fact that it was touched by a mischievous cherub angel and came out with a heart. And having a heart, it had feelings as sensitive as a puppy dog's. But no one, not even the men working on the assembly line, could notice this.

Gift

The new little car with a heart was displayed in a dealer's showroom in the last quarter of the year. As it happened, a pair of doting parents bought it as a Christmas gift for their teenage son. On Christmas Day, the teenage son jumped up and down with joy when he saw his gift car. He immediately got in and drove it around the elite village where he and his parents live. The next day, he showed it off to his friends and they drove around town happily.

But after the holidays were over and classes resumed for the New Year, the teenage son proved to be an irresponsible motorist. He pushed the little car to its limits, straining its small engine and, unknown to him, its little heart. He did not look after the little car properly and did not bring it back to the dealer for scheduled check-ups. He ordered the family driver to bring it to the gasoline station for an oil change, but that was about all the care the little car got.

One day, the teenage son recklessly raced with another car on the highway. Since the other car had a bigger engine, the little car was easily left behind, more so because it was not in good condition. The teenage son was disappointed but he did not learn his lesson. The following week, he again engaged another car in a race and this time he had an accident, crashing into the rear of a slow-moving car.

Verge

The teenage son was not seriously injured, but the little car's front end was severely damaged and, unknown to any human being, its little heart was on the verge of breaking. The doting parents, egged on by their son, decided to sell the little car "as is where is" without repairing it first.

They had a hard time finding any buyers since it was badly damaged. Finally, a taxi operator offered to buy it at a bargain price. The taxi operator had the little car repaired and fielded it with his other cabs. The little car was driven at least 16 hours a day and had no rest. It was extremely exhausted and its little heart grew sadder with every passing day.

Uncaring

Since it was not built to be a taxi, after a year and a half of abuse the little car's heart gave out and it suffered a breakdown. The uncaring taxi operator decided to sell it, but first he had it repaired so that it could have a chance of getting a buyer. He advertised it in a newspaper at a low price, just enough to cover the cost of repairs.

The little car was put on sale during the Christmas season, when cherub angels come down to earth to celebrate the birth of the Child Jesus. One of these visiting cherub angels was the mischievous one who had placed a heart in the little car. Feeling sorry for the little car, the angel arranged it so that a young loving couple would see the ad.

Saved

The young couple had been married for only two years and were not rich, but they had scrimped and saved to buy their first car. When they saw the little car at the taxi barn, they fell in love with it despite its being a rundown ex-taxi. They could not know that the mischievous cherub angel was hovering overthem, touching their hearts in such a way that they would be charmed by the little car and buy it as their Christmas gift for each other.

Since angels have a bit more foresight than human beings, the young couple proved to be the owners that the little car with a heart deserved. They took excellent care of the little car, repainting and restoring it step by step as the years went by, using their Christmas bonuses, for they were a hardworking pair. The little car's heart was made whole anew and it served the young couple well and lovingly for many years. As for the mischievous cherub angel, he never placed a heart in another car again.

Toyota's 'Taxilog' for the masses

INQUIRER Motoring tests the dual-fuel Avanza 1.3, and yes, the taximeter's flagged down

HONEY, I shrunk the Innova.

PHOTOS BY: RYAN LIM

By Tessa R. Salazar

First of two parts

INQUIRER MOTORING WAS FORTUNATE TO GET hold of Toyota's newest and soon-to-be beast of burden, the Avanza 1.3 liter. Why a future do-it-all workhorse? Toyota has touted this variant as its more compact replacement to its legendary FX and Revo lines. And as soon as the dealership gates opened for work the next day after the announcement, a long line of future taxi franchise holders have been a-ringin' and a-knockin'.

But the Avanza is not all about public utilities. There are, uh, "domesticated" versions of the Avanza for the high-brow market. The basic difference among the taxi variant (priced at P565,000), the privately owned 1.3 (P582,000) and the 1.5 G automatic (P773,000) and manual transmission (P738,000) is the third row seat. The Land Transportation Franchising Regulatory Board does not allow for seven- or eight-seaters for taxis—that means no third row for the metered ones.

Well, to say the least, it was a novelty to be handed a unit ready for charging passengers for every 250 meters they traveled. Toyota equipped the unit with a working taxi meter (situated where the stereo player should be) and a LED "For Hire" just behind the windshield's rear-view mirror. If the taxi meter was not running, the "For Hire" sign blinks bright red, so to avoid being flagged down by desperate commuters during the holiday rush, we had to turn the meter on.

'Taxilog'

That wasn't the only novel item in this particular Avanza unit. Replacing the third row seats was an LPG tank, tastefully hidden by carpet matting; this brings us to why we call this unit the "Taxilog." The rear area where the LPG tank was installed still had a pretty spacious room, which wise alecks joked could still be installed with a mini kitchen. So, when morning rush-hour passengers boarded the taxi, they were immediately handed the menu and offered the breakfast fare. Talk about "fast" food, or eating on the run.

But don't let your mouths water yet. Toyota Motors Philippines will not be churning out LPG-equipped Avanzas as standard OEMs. Future Avanza taxi owners will have to install the LPG systems with two TMP-accredited suppliers, which for now Toyota officials are mum on revealing. Suffice to say that these suppliers passed various technical and administrative tests administered by Toyota.

LPG system

The Avanza taxi, of course, will come with an LPG-ready receptacle. If the owner/operator decides to give the LPG system a try, the Toyota dealer will get in touch with the recommended supplier who will install the LPG tank.

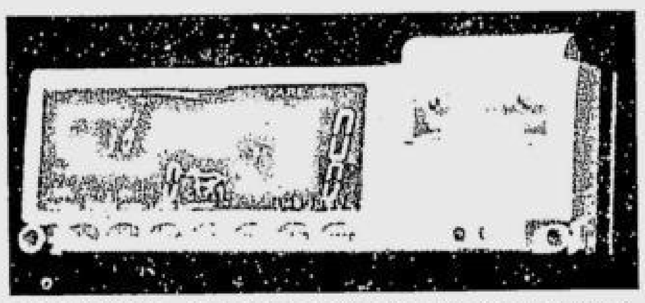
Toyota said installing the LPG system would cost an additional P50,000 to P60,000.

The taxi meter installation will not be offered in Toyota dealers, however. Customers can have these installed at their preferred suppliers.

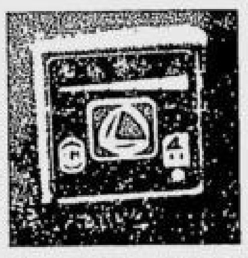
The hype surrounding the Avanza is well-founded. Before its Philippine introduction last month, 210,000 Avanzas had already been sold in Asia. The Avanza arrives here as CBU (completely built-up) from Indonesia, where it was first introduced in January 2004. It also sold like hotcakes in Malaysia and Thailand, and even as far as Mexico—well it sold like tacos there. There are also further plans to sell the Avanza to the Middle East and African markets.

It looks like Toyota has another no-nonsense, hardworking overachiever for the working masses-but with a flair for the environment. That's perfectly fine with us.

(Next week: But does it have the 'oomph'?)



THE STEREO...NOT! This taxi meter can even print out receipts—if only this one had paper. Meter installation will not be offered in Toyota dealers, though. Customers can have these installed at their preferred suppliers.



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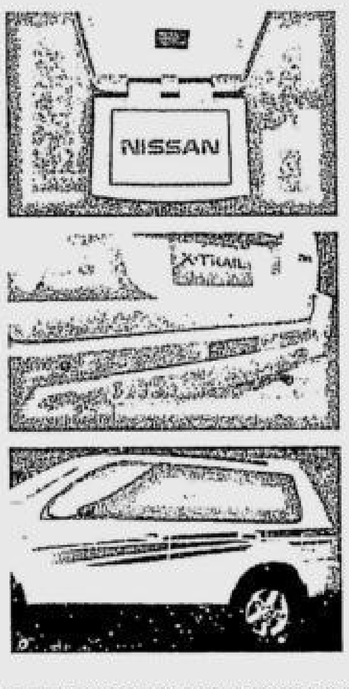

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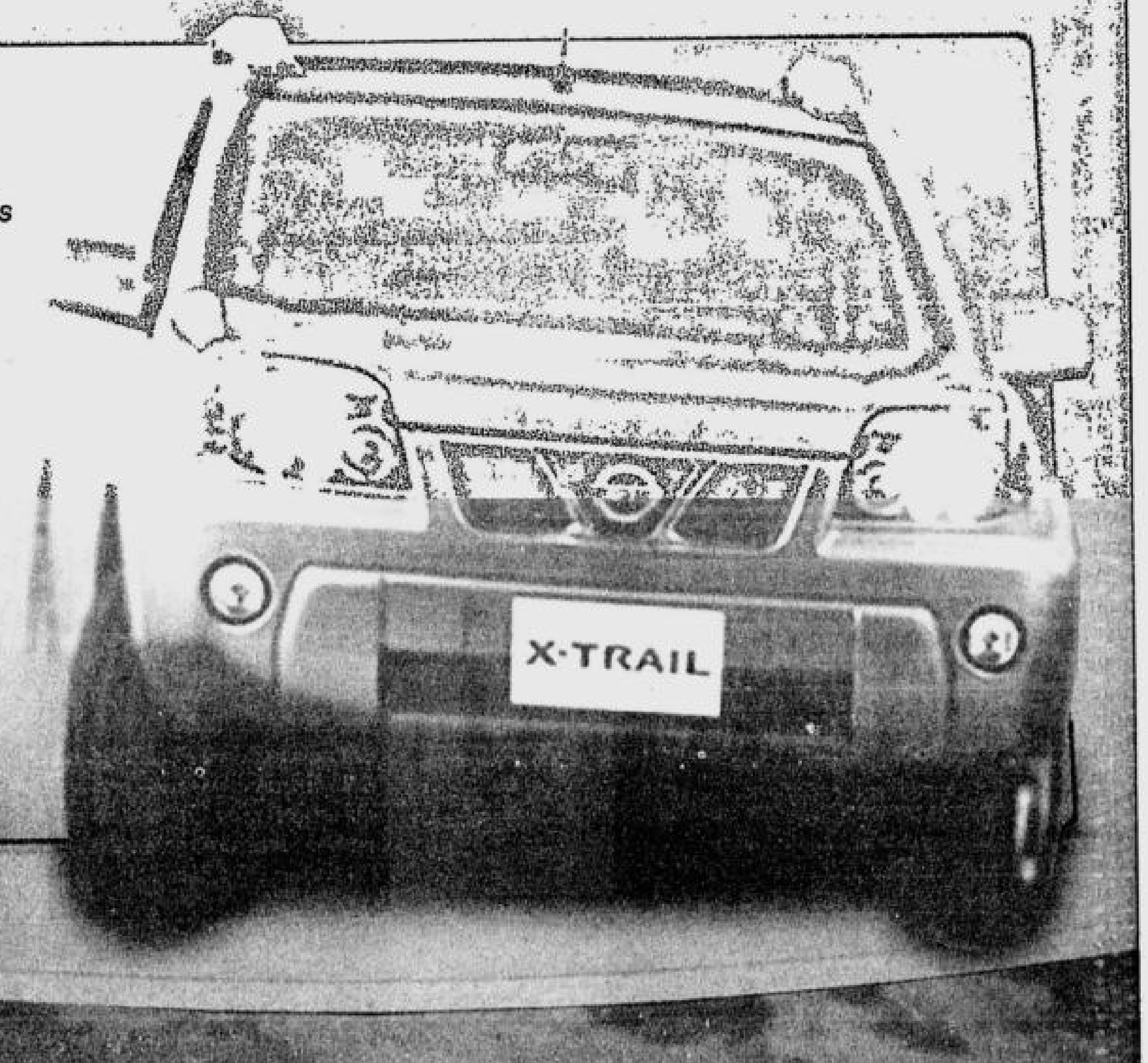

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Japan data dent yen; Taiwan stocks at 6-yr high

Trading quiet in most Asian markets due to Christmas holidays

SINGAPORE—THE YEN HIT A two-month low to the dollar and Japanese government bonds rose on Tuesday, as inflation and consumption data raised further doubts about whether the Bank of Japan will raise interest rates next month.

Trading was quiet in most Asian markets, but Taiwan shares hit a six-year high on hopes that financial ties with China could accelerate, and a regional index touched the latest in a series of record highs.

Oil prices rose more than half a percent as an unusually warm spell in the United States looked set to end and after the United Nations agreed sanctions against Iran.

Japan's core consumer price index rose in line with expectations and personal consumption fell less than forecast in November, but the data failed to shift doubts about whether Japanese rates will be lifted from 0.25 percent in January.

"The household spending data was better than expected. But if you ask whether that means there is a 'go' sign for a Bank of Japan rate rise in January, I don't think that's the case," a Japanese trust bank trader said. "I think the sense in the market is that a rate rise in January is still a bit difficult."

Investors' expectations of a hike began to be scaled back last week after BOJ Governor Toshihiko Fukui said Japanese consumption and consumer prices had softened.

The dollar bought around 118.95 yen early yesterday afternoon after hitting a two-month high of 119 yen on electronic trading platform EBS.

The dollar had stood at 118.85 yen in late Tokyo trading on Monday, when European and US markets were shut for Christmas.

Tokyo's Nikkei rose 0.5 percent, with the slower-than-expected fall in personal consumption pushing Fast Retailing Co. Ltd. up 1.8 percent, but overall activity was low.

"Foreigners aren't buying at all," said Ken Masuda, senior dealer in equities at Shinko Securities. "When volume is thin ... small-caps are really the only things that move."

MSCI's broadest index of shares elsewhere in Asia was up 0.1 percent yesterday afternoon, after earlier touching the latest in a string of peaks notched up over the past two months.

China's main index rose 0.5 percent, even though most shares fell, as investors bought financial heavyweights such as Industrial & Commercial Bank of China on hopes they will benefit from changes to the tax system.

Taiwan's benchmark index rose 1.1 percent to its highest in six years, led by financial and food companies, as investors cheered news that the central bank would only need a week to set up a legal exchange mechanism between the Taiwan dollar and China's renminbi if it gets the official go-ahead.

Seoul's benchmark index fell 0.25 percent, while Singapore's Straits Times dipped 0.2 percent.

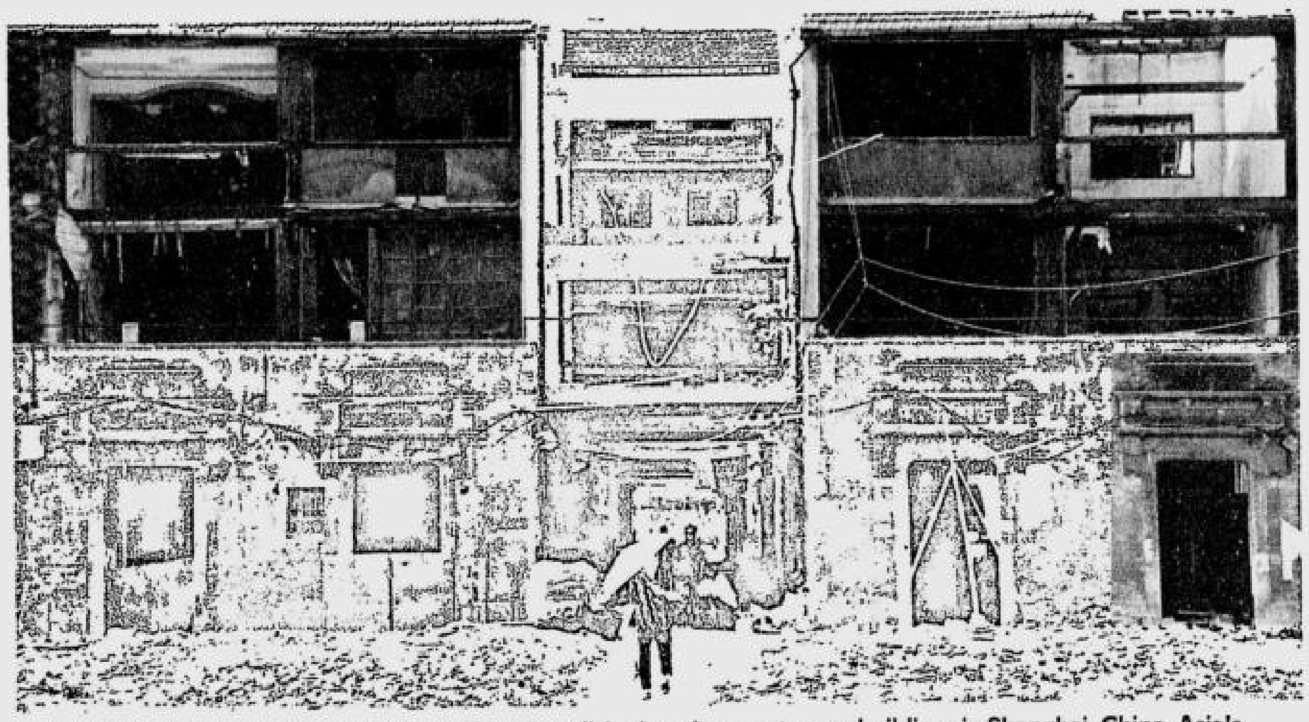
NYMEX crude for February delivery rose 43 cents to $62.84 a barrel, although activity was thin.

Prices had fallen by just over $1 last week, as traders bet unusually warm weather in the US Northeast would reduce oil demand. But conditions are forecast to grow chillier towards the end of the week, nearing normal by Saturday.

Dealers were also returning their attention to Iran, the world's fourth-largest crude producer, after the United Nations agreed on trade sanctions aimed at banning imports and exports of materials related to atomic work.

Gold edged up in thin trade to around $624.30 an ounce.

Reuters



RESIDENTS walk near old houses that will be demolished to give way to new buildings in Shanghai, China. Asia's booming giants, China and India, confront daunting challenges as they strive to keep their economies expanding fast enough to raise growing numbers of their 2.3 billion people out of poverty. AP

China seen growing about 9.5% in '07

SHANGHAI/BEIJING—CHINA'S ECONOMY is expected to maintain robust, relatively inflation-free growth next year, a state think-tank and central bank officials said on Tuesday.

The economy would probably grow by around 9.5 percent in 2007 as anticipated rises in domestic consumption offset slowing fixed-asset investment and foreign trade, the State Information Centre said in a report.

The body, which is part of the National Development and Reform Commission, the top economic planning agency, said that it expected gross domestic product to grow within a range of 8.5 percent to 10.5 percent next year.

"If the economy maintains a steady but fast growth, GDP growth should be at about 9.5 percent," said the report published in the Shanghai Securities News.

The economy is on track to record its fourth straight year of double-digit growth in 2006, but many economists expect it to slow modestly in 2007.

Separately, assistant central bank governor Yi Gang told a forum that he expected consumer inflation to remain steady at within 3 percent next year, as a good grain harvest this year meant pressure on food prices would be limited.

Annual consumer price inflation has remained at below 2 percent all of this year, but it jumped to 1.9 percent in November from 1.4 percent in October largely because of rapid growth in food prices.

Reuters

METRO

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Housing, health, tech stocks touted as Wall St. sleeper hits

NEW YORK—HOMEBUILDING, TECHNOLOGY and health care did more to hurt portfolios than help this year, but they may well emerge as the sleeper stocks of 2007.

As money managers start identifying their best prospects in equities for next year, these laggards of 2006 are topping many "must-revisit" lists.

Fund managers see them offering opportunity for outperformance as conditions in their sectors show some of the best the potential for improvement.

Laggards to leaders

Take homebuilders: It's no secret that homebuilding shares have been one of the worst performers this year, with the Dow Jones Home Construction Index dropping as much as 40 percent in the spring when the bottom fell out of the housing market.

Despite a bit of a comeback, the group's down 23 percent this year.

"One thing is certain, the recovery in performance in these groups will precede the upturn in housing activity," said John Gould, portfolio manager of the Schafer Cullen High Dividend Equity Fund.

Health-care stocks have been little better. They had the poorest performance of the 10 major industry sectors comprising the Standard & Poor's 500 index in 2006 thanks to big drops in medical device makers such as Boston Scientific Corp. and St. Jude Medical Inc.

And, of course, there's the tech sector, on pace for another year of underperformance. Yet a decent showing in the second half of 2006 is drawing money managers' eyes as 2007 approaches.

Reconstructing builders

The makings for a rebound in housing-related stocks appears to be in place, some money managers say.

Already the Dow homebuilder index, comprising such stocks as KB Home, Centex Corp. and D.R. Horton Inc., has rebounded more than 16 percent since September.

With extremely low expectations and valuations for homebuilders, investors like Gould are already sensing the start of a rebound in terms of positive earnings estimate revisions by Wall Street analysts.

Edgar Peters, chief investment officer at Boston-based PanAgora Asset Management, shares Gould's sentiment, saying if interest rates remain stable, it's possible that the housing market will do well.

Borrowing costs on 30-year fixed-rate mortgages, excluding fees, average 6.10 percent—below year-ago levels of 6.22 percent.

Poised for take off

Shares in technology, particularly in the computer storage and software groups, could emerge as sleeper stocks as well.

"Technology remains high on our radar due to constant need for major product upgrades to drive productivity initiatives in areas of telecom, data storage, and data security," said Fred Dickson, chief market strategist at D.A. Davidson in Lake Oswego, Oregon.

Matthew Pugsley, managing editor at BCA Research, said the steady increase in new content growth as a result of increased bandwidth and broadband services should drive up data storage demand for the foreseeable future.

Pugsley said the storage group remains a "core tech overweight in our portfolio."

Software shares have enjoyed a powerful rally in recent months and investors could look to book profits as a period of consolidation sets in, he said.

"But we doubt this will mark a cyclical share price peak because software profit margins have more upside," said Pugsley.

Oracle Corp., Adobe Systems and Symantec Corp. are among the stocks to consider in the group.

Another reason to be bullish on tech: The tech component in the S&P was up only 8.50 percent in total returns, suggesting more gains in 2007.

Health care did no better, up only 6.2 percent this year, dragged down by Boston Scientific, the worst performer in the sector component year-to-date, declining 31 percent, followed by St. Jude, down 25.7 percent.

Gail Dudack of Dudack Research Group said both heath care and tech consistently rank at or near the top of lists ranking the highest earnings growth forecasts for 2007, lowest 12-month forward price/earnings relative to 25-year averages and lowest estimated 2007 price-earnings to growth (PEG) ratios.

In addition, the health-care and tech sectors have year-over-year earnings growth rates that beat their composite index in each quarter in 2007.

Reuters

'Made in Taiwan' tech label given fresh spin

Territory evolves from manufacturing to design

TAIPEI—TAIWAN'S COMPUTER MAKERS ARE morphing from simple contract manufacturers into designers and innovators as they fight for survival in a competitive sector.

Four out of five new notebook computers are now designed on the island, as firms making everything from cell phones to PCs move from a "do what you're told" mentality to a "let's innovate" one, transforming the "Made in Taiwan" label.

The change is partly driven by new business opportunities, but also by sheer competition as companies try to set themselves apart with their innovative design.

Some of the world's top electronics makers, from PC makers Dell Inc. and Hewlett-Packard Co. to cell phone makers Nokia and Motorola, are looking to domestic behind-the-scenes players with names like Quanta Computer Inc. and Asustek Computer Inc. to not only make, but also design their latest gadgets.

Dell, the world's top PC maker, said that over 50 percent of its notebook PCs are now designed in Taiwan by its locally based team working closely with its manufacturing partners.

Dell, whose top Taiwan manufacturing partners include Quanta, set up its design center in Taiwan in 2002 with 50 people for PC and notebook development.

Since then the facility has grown more than six-fold to 330 staffers.

As competition in the fast-paced IT world intensifies, Taiwanese firms are trying everything they can to give their clients added-value services.

Taiwan computer makers such as Quanta, Asustek and Lite-On Technology Corp. have all created their own design teams, earning reputations as new product pioneers and winning awards in global competitions.

Having design teams close to the manufacturers has also become more strategically logical for foreign tech firms. Most final production is done nearby, in mainland China.

Contract makers are using their design capability to distinguish themselves from one another, realizing sophisticated design capabilities can attract customers who want everything from MP3 players to mobile phones and laptop computers.

"At some point you can't compete on cost alone, so you have to turn to design," said Markus Wierzoch, a product design manager for Asustek.

The move to design marks a coming of age for Taiwan firms, which have migrated from pure manufacturing work, or Original Equipment Manufacture (OEM), in the 1980s to a new type of work, called original design manufacturing, or ODM, starting in the 1990s.

As competition heats up, the level of design services offered in Taiwan has increased as well, as players try to distinguish themselves in industries where margins are already razor-thin.

As a result, the island is earning a name for its new generation of young engineers and designers who are winning awards in global competitions for their work.

"Perceptions regarding Taiwan's design has really changed a lot in the past five years or so," said Wierzoch.

While awards may be a pat on the back, the Taiwanese firms are less motivated by prestige and payment than by sheer necessity.

Reuters

Inflation expected to further slow down in '07

Rise in consumer prices next year seen to range from 4.3% to 4.8%

By Michelle V. Remo

INFLATION IS EXPECTED TO FURTHER slow down in 2007, partly due to a tempered increase in global oil prices and the absence of a plan for another tax hike.

The National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) said that inflation next year would probably settle at anywhere between 4.3 and 4.8 percent.

For 2006, the Neda said, full-year inflation could hit an average of only 6.4 percent. This also reflected a deceleration from 2005, when the rate hovered at the 7-percent level.

"Oil prices are not rising significantly, owing partly to positive geopolitical developments," said Dennis Arroyo, Neda director for policy and planning.

Citing a recent report, Arroyo said that Russia has taken the top spot in terms of volume of oil production from Saudi Arabia, whose production was often subject to Middle East conflicts.

Arroyo said that the Dubai crude, the benchmark used in setting oil prices, is expected to hit an average of at least $63 a barrel, which is not too far removed from current prices.

The Philippines, heavily dependent on imported oil, is adversely affected by increase in global oil prices. The country imports over 90 percent of its oil requirements.

Arroyo also said that since the Reformed Value-Added Tax law had been implemented this year, substantial rise in commodity prices had already taken place in 2006, and would no longer be expected next year.

"In 2007, we will come from a high base, so inflation will slow down," he said.

The Arroyo administration is also not expected to push for additional tax hikes next year following the implementation of the VAT law this year.

The VAT law, which is estimated to yield about P75 billion in additional taxes for the government this year alone, is considered to be the centerpiece of the Arroyo administration's fiscal reform agenda.

With the help of the VAT law, the government expected to bring down its budget deficit to P63 billion next year, and to zero by 2008. The deficit is projected to hit between P80 billion and P90 billion this year, from the P146.8 billion posted last year.

The VAT law, which was strongly opposed while being deliberated in Congress, expanded the coverage of the VAT to include previously exempted oil and electricity, among others. It also increased the VAT rate from 10 to 12 percent, and corporate income tax from 32 to 35 percent.

The Department of Finance said the government would not push for any new tax hikes in 2007 and would simply concentrate on collecting the promised revenues from the present VAT law.

Arroyo said this would help further slow down inflation next year.

For this year, the slowdown in inflation is attributed to the strengthening of the peso and mild oil price increases.

After hovering in the 54-to-a-dollar level in 2005, the peso strengthened to the 49-to-a-dollar level amid rising dollar inflows from foreign investments and remittances from overseas Filipino workers.

A stronger peso makes imported goods cheaper, therefore tempering the increase in domestic prices.

PPA mulls 15% tariff hike in cargo handling

THE PHILIPPINE PORTS AUTHORITY IS considering a new round of cargo-handling tariff hike petitions for next year.

According to PPA general manager Oscar Sevilla, International Container Terminal Services Inc. (ICTSI) and Asian Terminals Inc (ATI), the country's two biggest port operators, had asked for a 30-percent increase in tariff toward the end of 2005, but received only a 15-percent hike in February this year.

"Since they only got a 15-percent tariff increase, we may have to consider whether to grant another 15 percent next year," Sevilla said.

ICTSI and ATI had said the proposed 30-percent increase would help offset rising interest rates, among others.

Shipping groups are expected to oppose the proposed increase if business does not pick up early next year.

Cargo movements dropped by 3 percent in the third quarter of this year, and foreign container traffic fell 2 percent in the same period.

The Association of International Shipping Lines, in fact, has long been urging the two port operators to keep the status quo until market conditions improve.

The Coalition for Ports Modernization, meanwhile, was reported to have sought a rollback in tariff rates.

Sevilla said the PPA will summon various stakeholders to public hearings next year to discuss the proposed tariff changes.

Riza T. Olchondra

Globe's wireline unit sees cut in subscribers' fees

By Riza T. Olchondra

INNOVE COMMUNICATIONS INC., THE wireline subsidiary of the Ayala-led Globe Telecom Inc., may lower service charges for landline subscribers due to the continuing appreciation of the peso against the US dollar.

In a filing with the National Telecommunications Commission, Innove said the peso strengthened to P49.84 against the greenback this month, compared to the base exchange rate of P25.24 to the dollar in July 1996.

This resulted in a currency exchange rate adjustment (Cera) of 246 percent as of December. This figure is actually lower than the rate that was seen in the first quarter of 2006. In March, the dollar was at P51.82 and the Cera was computed at 259.80 percent.

Cera is an authority the NTC had granted to telephone operators, allowing them to automatically adjust local exchange rates by one percent for every 10-centavo increase or decrease in the peso-dollar exchange.

Because of this, Globe "may have to trim local wireline charges," a company official said.

The official said service charges helps the telco sustain basic service quality. A stronger peso helps keep service rates down.

Innove provides residential and business wireline services, voice services for postpaid and prepaid telephone lines, IDD, national direct dial, fax and Internet services.

Franchising seen as key to regional market integration

By Ronnel W. Domingo

LOCAL FRANCHISERS ARE PUSHING FOR their business model as a way of advancing efforts toward economic integration among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as the bloc aims for an Asean Economic Community by 2015.

Samie Lim, chair emeritus of the Philippine Franchisers Association, proposed for an Asean franchise exchange program that would pave the way for a concerted effort among franchise operators and franchisees in the region.

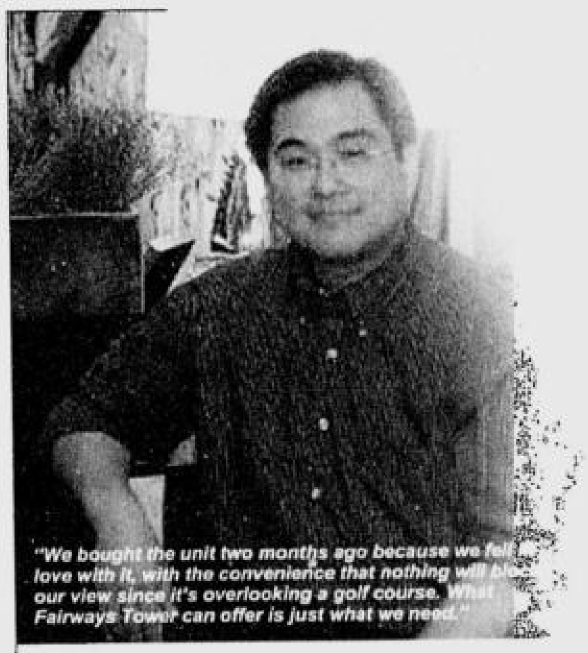
Lim said the program could take off with what successful region-based, international franchises have achieved so far, especially those based in the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia.

"Regional integration in the field of franchising could start through a (trade show) where national franchise associations could hold exhibits, and where each country's franchising profile could be showcased, including information on how to do franchising in each country," he explained.

Lim added that the program could also cover franchises in Asean member countries that have successfully put up operations overseas.

In the Philippines, such franchises include fast-food chain Jollibee, which has outlets in California, Guam and Saipan in the United States; Vietnam, Indonesia and Brunei.

Lim said the franchising push could also be given a boost with complementary efforts in the tourism and travel sector.



"We bought the unit two months ago because we fel love with it, with the convenience that nothing will bl our view since it's overlooking a golf course. What Fairways Tower can offer is just what we need."

Rico Hizon finds new home at Fairways Tower

Very few Filipinos have retained their good faith in the country. It is thus remarkable that those who have already thrived and have essentially worked overseas almost all their lives still maintain a high regard for the Philippines.

Though he permanently resides and leads a very successful broadcast journalism career in Singapore, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) business news anchor Rico Hizon makes it a point to visit the Philippines with his wife Melannie at least eight times every year. With both their families living in Metro Manila, they always come over to their respective kin to maintain their close-knit relationships.

After eight years of going back and forth and discussing possible investments, the couple decided to buy a condominium unit that conveniently offers a place to stay while they are in the country. At that time, Hizon felt that owning a house is more demanding and harder to maintain. Condominium living felt like a logical choice for them.

However, condo-hunting was not an easy task as majority of units being offered would either take years to finish or were simply above their budget.

He was then made aware of One-McKinley Place-Philtown's first venture into high-rise residential projects. He was impressed with the quality, style and workmanship that were evident in every aspect of the building, therefore he came to a decision to acquire a unit from Philtown's newest project in Bonifacio Global City. The Fairways Tower, a 28-story exclusive residential condominium that offers maximum convenience in a strategic location with all the amenities that comfortable living brings. Located at the corner of Forbes and McKinley, and right next to the Manila Golf Club, it is considered the premiere address in Bonifacio and will be ready for turnover by April 2007, giving interested buyers just a few more months to buy a unit for themselves.

On a more personal insight, Rico expressed his interest in acquiring a Philtown project because he knew personally Philtown's chairman Jose Concepcion III, which explains his trust and confidence on Philtown.

Rico Hizon with wife, Melannie beside the Fairways scale model.

Rico Hizon with his wife, Melannie together with their son, Migo.

Philtown is best known for its development and selling of industrial estates, middle-income vertical residential projects and high-end condominiums that provide modern lifestyle in the country. Philtown has made its mark as "Builders of Masterpieces" with having One McKinley Place, Metropolitan, W.H. Taft Residences and Fairways Towers.

A cozy and relaxing abode is just perfect to compensate for the lifestyle that Hizon circulates in his profession. With a vigorous schedule of news gathering, reporting and attending editorial meetings, he works in a morning show that requires upbeat attention and alertness in the working environment. A vacation in the Philippines, which he considers a very important agenda in his life, should be deemed worthy by living in a place that can take you away from the outside noise and let you sit back and relax while watching breathtaking sceneries at bay. The Manila Golf Club view that the Fairways Tower offers served that purpose for Rico and his wife, Melannie which made their yearly vacation even more appealing.

Rico Hizon, with President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, receiving his TOYM award.

Melannie, in particular, expressed her desires to decorate and finally move in to "their own home" that offers excellent amenities that also best accommodate their growing son, Migo's need for playing space.

"We bought the unit two months ago because we fell in love with it, with the convenience that nothing will block our view since it's overlooking a golf course," Hizon said. "What Fairways Tower can offer is just what we need."

Along with Rico's apparent love for his homeland is his confidence that the Philippines produce world-class citizens that can be at par with the rest of the world. Before he was hired at BBC, Rico learned the ropes from bottom up dealing with the ups and downs of local journalism. The ultimate twist in his career ensued when he finally found his niche in business reporting just when most reporters ventured into the other action-packed beats. When foreign employers were looking for an Asian-bred business broadcast journalist, he stepped up and successfully provided them with a new dimension from his experiences in his reporting stint here. Luckily, it worked for the Asia-Pacific market.

"When I joined CNBC in 1995, I was the only Filipino reporter and news anchor. 'When I joined BBC World in 2002, I was also the only Filipino working there," Hizon said.

His patriotism worked wonders and became his ultimate foundation for his personal advocacy that translated into his brainchild--a fusion of international business journalism and community service called GoodNewsPilipinas.com. This website, that gets 20,000 to 30,000 hits a day, reports the good amongst Filipinos that are worthy to celebrate about. This endeavor seeks to shun away from the politics that consistently polarizes the country. "There's so much good news in the Philippines and the Filipinos that needs to be emphasized and be informed not only here but in other countries as well," Hizon said.

Rico takes pride in all his investments and put a great deal of time and effort in picking the right property or art for that matter and places his complete trust in Philtown's unwavering consistency in delivering masterpieces on time. Having finally found a home he can call his own, despite living permanently in Singapore, premier broadcast journalist Rico Hizon, who is one of The Outstanding Young Men (TOYM) awardees for broadcast journalism excellence, has also sealed the bond between him and the Philippines. His success ultimately reflects how gratifying it is that successful Filipinos recognize and appreciate their roots.

"I love my country and I'm proud to be a Filipino. And it is indeed an honor to be representing my country on the global broadcasting stage," he said.

For inquiries and reservations, call 8181723 to 24 or 890-5714 or email at sales@philtown.net or visit www.philtown.net

adv

OFWs launch global coop

BALIKPINAS MULTI-PURPOSE COOPERAtive, a leading global cooperative of Filipino professionals in the Philippines and abroad, shall hold its Mega Launch and Expo on Jan. 13 and 14 at the Megatrade Hall 2, 5/F Building B, SM Megamall, Mandaluyong City.

With its theme, "Toward self-sufficiency and prosperity: Empowering the global Filipino", the affair will showcase the coop's institutional partners, accredited suppliers, government agencies, and other exhibitors. It will feature a pasalubong shopping arcade, free seminars, travel and leisure, business and investment opportunities, career development and job fair, beauty and wellness services, medical tourism, raffle prizes, and entertainment.

The Mega Launch and Expo will be BalikPinas' first major event for 2007. Among the other exciting projects being planned for 2007 are trade fairs and assemblies in key provinces and cities, and in selected countries where there are OFWs and dependents.

BalikPinas is a nontraditional, mainstream cooperative founded by reputable Filipino professionals, overseas Filipino workers, *balikbayans*, and their friends and relatives in the Philippines. Inspired by successful cooperatives in other countries, BalikPinas aims to provide personal, professional, and social services to members and related markets, as well as to promote entrepreneurship and love of country. It has members worldwide, including in such countries as Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Dubai, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States.

Key government officials, cabinet members and local government officials are expected to grace the BalikPinas Mega Launch and Expo. The two-day affair is being held mainly for the benefit of OFWs, *balikbayans*, Filipino professionals, their families and friends. There will be product samplings and presentations by BalikPinas' partner vendors and institutions. At the same time, membership is open to OFWs, *balikbayans*, Filipino professionals and their families during the Mega Launch and Expo.

The BalikPinas Mega Launch and Expo is being held in partnership with JobsDB.com, Enchanted Kingdom, Philippine Airlines, Department of Tourism and Department of Labor.

Interested parties may call BalikPinas at 636 6099 or log on to www.balikpinas.com.ph.

'MAKE A CHILD HAPPY' MALL TOUR

School children pose with SM Foundation Inc officers and staff as they gleefully wave their hands after they were treated to a fun-filled activity in SM Sucat, Paranaque. 'Make A Child Happy' is an outreach project of SM Foundation Inc aimed to bring Christmas cheer to street children, orphans, children from depressed areas and children from half-way homes. The activity includes games, singing of carols, toys distribution and gift-giving by the Foundation as well as by its partner agencies and media partners. Toys that were collected during the Foundation's 'Share A Toy' program held early this year were cleaned, polished and distributed to eager recipients; other toys were donated by Toy Kingdom and Storyland. Children's books that were earlier collected from the mall's 'Donate-a-Book' projects formed part of the loot bags given the children. The Mall Tour that started Nov. 20 in SM San Lazaro has also been to SM Supermalls in Luzon, while the activity in the SM Malls in Mindanao started Dec. 11 in Cagayan de Oro and went to Davao Dec. 13; SM Iloilo Dec. 15, SM Bacolod Dec. 16, and SM Mall of Asia Dec. 19. The tour will end on Dec. 28 at SM Cebu.

'Make A Soda-Wish' this season

AS AN ANSWER TO THE GROWING needs of its steady clientele through the years, the popular Pink & Blue Soda which used to cater mainly to the teen market has evolved and made new strides in the fashion world. The brand which was known to fashion aficionados as Pink & Blue Soda has metamorphosed into the mature but definitely hip and cool Soda by Pink and Soda Man by Blue.

Soda by Pink and Soda Man by Blue's thrust is to offer a niche market for the upwardly mobile female and the savvy mobile male, respectively. Classics which patrons have come to love have been upgraded and at the same time offer fresher cuts and edgier designs of jeans, tops, jackets, camisoles, shirts, pants, undergarments and other indispensable personal items never seen before.

The rebranding and re-imaging of Soda has already begun with famous celebrities Bianca Gonzales, Mariel Rodriguez and Borgy Manotoc actively endorsing the new merchandise. Adding to the glitzy roster of celebrity endorsers is beautiful actress Iza Calzado. Fashionistas are now being given a sneak peek on what more is in store for the Soda brand. As a prelude to its 18-year campaign and coming of age, Soda has already started refurbishing its outlets, particularly in SM Southmall in Las Piñas.

Soda's new store design is fashionable, sophisticated and sleek with a color scheme consisting mainly of off white and neutral tones. Soda store's main element is the intersection of hangers made of stainless steel and powder coated BI. pipes placed at the center of the shop as part of its wall modules. Crazy-cut stonewalls as well as watercolor graphics complete the accented interiors. Soda's new look is expected to be completed in popular malls in Ortigas, Makati and Quezon City by next year.

In this season of giving and sharing, take advantage of Soda's "Make a Soda Wish" by purchasing the special "Loads of Love" T-shirt for only P99 which can be availed of for every minimum purchase worth P300 in a single transaction. Proceeds go to the Make-A-Wish Foundation Philippines, which aims to fulfill wishes of children between the ages of 3 to 18.

Soda's "Make A Soda-Wish This Holiday" is made possible in cooperation with Shue Uemura, Kiehl's, Puerto del Sol and Wave 89.1. Promo is ongoing until Feb. 15, 2007. Soda by Pink and Blue is a contemporary line of Pink & Blue Soda and signals a new genre in fashion wear and accessories.

OMC, PBSP TIE UP FOR 'BALIK BATERYA'

The Oriental and Motolite Corp (OMC) and the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) recently forged a partnership to promote the 'Balik Baterya' Program. The program's goal is the collection of used lead-acid batteries for proper recycling and production of new automotive and industrial batteries. It aims to clear the environment of hazardous wastes and help fight TB incidence foremost among public utility vehicle drivers in the country. Shown during the agreement signing are PBSP members (from left) David Balangue, SGV chair and managing partner, Jose Antonio Banson, Monark chair and CEO, Ramon Agustines, Oriental & Motolite Corp president, Manuel Pangilinan, PLDT chair and PBSP chair, Marixi Prieto, Inquirer board chair, and Ma. Luisa Perez-Rubio, Ponderosa Farms Inc chair.

Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
ADELA SERRA TY MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER
Capitol Hills, Tandag, Surigao del Sur
Telefax No. (086) 211-3700

Invitation to Apply for Eligibility and to Bid

2nd Women's Health and Safe Motherhood Project
(2WHSMP)
Loan No. 7290-PH

Construction of Annex Building of Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center – Phase II

1. The Government of the Philippines (GOP) has applied for a Loan from the World Bank toward the cost of 2nd Women's Health and Safe Motherhood Project (2WHSMP) and intends to apply part of the proceeds of this loan, together with the GOP counterpart funds to payments under the contract for the Construction of Annex Building of Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center – Phase II.
2. The Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center Hospital Bids and Awards Committee (HBAC) now invites sealed Bids from eligible Bidders for the above-mentioned project. Completion of work is required by 270 calendar days.
3. Bidding will be conducted through open competitive bidding procedures as specified in the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of Republic Act No. 9184 (R.A. 9184), otherwise known as the Government Procurement Reform Act. Subject to exceptions stated in this Bidding Documents, only Bids from Bidders who pass an eligibility check will be opened. The Bidder with the Lowest Calculated Bid (LCB) shall advance to the post-qualification stage in order to finally determine its responsiveness to the technical and financial requirements of the project. The contract shall then be awarded to the Lowest Calculated Responsive Bidder (LCRB) who was determined as such during post-qualification. The estimated project cost is ***Thirty Two Million Two Hundred Thousand Pesos Only (Php32,200,000.00)***.
4. The documents required in the Eligibility Documents shall be submitted as part of the Technical Documents of the Bidders as provided in the Instructions to Bidders.
5. Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center HBAC and inspect the Bidding Documents at the address given below from **8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on January 6-15, 2007.**
6. A compete set of Bidding Documents in English may be purchased by interested Bidders from the address below and upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of Ten Thousand Pesos only (Php10,000.00). The Bidding Documents shall be received personally by the bidder or his authorized representative on **January 15-February 15, 2007.**

   Hospital Bids and Awards Committee
   Attention: Secretariat
   Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center
   Tandag, Surigao del Sur
   Tel. No. 086-2114306
   Fax No. 086-2113700
7. The Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center HBAC will hold a Pre-Bid Conference open to all Eligible Bidders on **10:00 a.m., February 21, 2007** at the following address **Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center Conference Room, Tandag, Surigao del Sur.**
8. Eligible Bidders must submit their Bids at the address below on or before **10:00 a.m., March 7, 2007.** All Bids must be accompanied by a Bid security in either of the herein prescribed forms and minimal amounts in percentage based on the ABC or an equivalent amount in a freely convertible currency. Late Bids shall not be accepted.

Form of Bid Security	Minimum Amount in % of the Approved Budget for the Contract
Cash, certified check, cashier's check, manager's check, bank draft or irrevocable letter of credit	Php322,000.00
Bank guarantee	Php483,000.00

Bid opening shall be at **10:01 a.m., March 7, 2007 at the Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center Conference Room, Tandag, Surigao del Sur.** Bids will be opened in the presence of the Bidders' representatives who choose to attend.

9. Completion of the Works is required by **March 16, 2008.**
10. The Adela Serra Ty Memorial Medical Center HBAC reserves the right to accept or reject any Bid, to annul the bidding process, and to reject all Bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected Bidder or Bidders.

ANTONITA OROZCO, MD.
HBAC Chairman

(PDI-Dec. 20 & 27, 2006)

Republic of the Philippines
Province of Cagayan
Municipality of Buguey

December 18, 2006

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Local Government Unit of Buguey, through its Supplemental Budget No. 01, CY 2006, intends to use the sum of FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND (P500,000.00) PESOS being the Approved Budget for the Contract for the Purchase of One (1) unit Second Hand Motor Vehicle described as follows:

DESCRIPTION : MITSUBISHI L300 VAN (EXCEED)
DIESEL ENGINE, 12 SEATERS
MODEL 2001

SCHEDULE OF BIDDING ACTIVITIES:

- Jan. 04, 2007 – Submission of Letter of Intent & Issuance of eligibility requirements.
  Jan. 05, 2007 – Issuance of notice of eligibility or non eligibility and issuance of Bid Documents upon payment of non-refundable amount of Five Hundred Pesos (P500.00)
- Jan. 15, 2007 – Deadline of Submission of Bids at 10:00 AM
  – Opening of Bids immediately after the submission of bids at the Office of the BAC Chairman

Interested bidders may obtain further information from the Office of the BAC Chairman, Municipal Building, Centro, Buguey, Cagayan.

All particulars relative to the Qualification/Eligibility, Bid Bond, Performance Bond, Pre-bid conference, Bid Evaluation and Award of Contract shall be governed by the provisions of RA 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations.

The Local Government Unit of Buguey reserves the right to reject any or all bids, to annul the bidding process, and to reject all Bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected Bidder or Bidders.

(Sgd.) MELVIN A. AGBALOG
BAC Chairman

(PDI – Dec. 27, 2006 & Jan. 3, 2007)

Republic of the Philippines
PROVINCE OF BUKIDNON
Provincial Capitol Malaybalay City
Tel. # 088-221-4820 & Telefax # 088-221-2537
E-mail Add. buk_provl_bac@yahoo.com.ph

OFFICE OF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR
Bids and Awards Committee

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Provincial Government of Bukidnon, through its Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), invites suppliers / manufacturers / distributors / contractors to apply for eligibility and to bid the hereunder projects:

NAME OF THE PROJECTS : Project I – Drugs and Medicines
Project II – Medical, Laboratory, Supplies and Reagents
LOCATION : Provincial General Services Office
BRIEF DESCRIPTION : For the use of seven (7) Provincial Hospitals and Twenty Two (22) Provincial Health Stations, for the first semester of CY 2007.
Approved Budget for the Contract : Project I – P35,145,204.12
Project II – P13,689,665.49
DELIVERY PERIOD : 15 calendar days upon receipt of Notice to Proceed
PLACE OF DELIVERY : Provincial General Services Office, Capitol Compound, Malaybalay City

Prospective bidders should have experience in undertaking similar project within the last **2 years**. The Eligibility Check/Screening as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids shall use non-discretionary "pass/fail" criteria. Post-qualification of the lowest calculated bid shall be conducted.

All particulars relative to Eligibility Statement and Screening, Bid Security, Performance Security, Pre-Bidding Conference, Evaluation of Bids, Post-Qualification and Award of Contract shall be governed by the pertinent provisions of R.A. 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulation (IRR).

The complete schedule of activities is listed, as follows.

Activities	Schedule
1. Advertisement	December 20 & 27, 2006
2. Issuance of Bid Documents	December 27, 2006
3. Pre-bid Conference	December 22, 2006
4. Application for Eligibility	January 03, 2007
5. Opening of Bids	January 09, 2007 at 10:00 A.M.
6. Deadline for submission of Bid Documents	January 09, 2007 at 9:00 A.M.

Bid documents will be available only to Prospective Bidders upon payment of non-refundable amount of P5,000.00 for Project I and P2,000.00 for Project II, at the **Provincial Treasurer's Office.**

Bids and eligibility requirements must be delivered at the BAC office, Capitol Compound, Malaybalay City. All Bids must be accompanied by a Bid Security equal to 1% for Cash, Certified check, Cashier's check, Manager's check, Bank draft or irrevocable letter of credit; 1.5% for Bank guarantee; 2.5% for Surety bond of the **Approved Budget for the Contract** as advertised. Late Bids shall not be accepted.

The **Province of Bukidnon** reserves the right to accept or reject any Bid, and to annul the bidding process and reject all Bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected Bidder or Bidders.

Contact Person: Ma. Joe-an P. Bayona
Tel. # – 088-221-2537/2548
Cel # – 09173491624

Approved.

(Sgd.) JOSEFREDIE F. FLORES
Prov'l Admin/BAC Chairman

(PDI – December 20 & 27, 2006)

Holiday feasts at Diamond Hotel

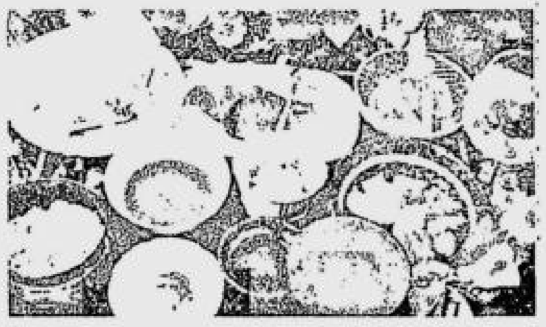
CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS IN more ways than you can imagine at Diamond Hotel. Be transported to new places when you dine at Restaurant Le Bellevue, Yurakuen Japanese Restaurant and Palm Court Café. Each restaurant has its own unique cuisine which gives guests more attractive choices for their Christmas celebrations.

For guests who seek a luxurious and romantic ambiance for the Holidays, Restaurant Le Bellevue's Euro-Continental cuisine is perfect. Enjoy Bellevue's Christmas set menu that includes a complete meal of an appetizer, consommé, main courses, and of course dessert for only P2,500++. And to give honor to the occasion, the restaurant treats guests to a glass of sparkling wine, which complements the sumptuous dishes in the set menu.

Meanwhile, Yurakuen Japanese Restaurant offers the Shimasu Set, a special menu prepared particularly for the Holidays. The Shimasu Set is a complete meal of signature Japanese dishes and is served with a variety of sauces and dips. This is available for the whole month of December.

Guests can also indulge in traditional Holiday dishes from all over the world with a glorious Christmas buffet at Palm Court Café. Take pleasure in sampling mouth-watering and irresistible appetizers, main dishes, and desserts for P850++ for lunch buffet and P900++ for dinner buffet.

For reservations and inquiries, call Diamond Hotel Philippines at 528-3000.



YURAKUEN'S Shimasu Set includes (clockwise from top left) Ebi Tempura, Beef and Gindara Kushiyaki, tofu steak, fruit salad, Maguro Usuzukuri, Miso soup, macaroni salad, and seafood fried rice.

FIGARO OPENS ON BANAWE AVENUE

An elegant cafe' softens the heart of Banawe Avenue. Figaro graciously welcomes coffee lovers with fresh coffee and warm service. Figaro beholds coffee in the classic tradition of serving it in real china. A place where you can have authentic Italian espresso served in a demitasse and a selection of pastries, pastas and sandwiches that will make you enjoy your favorite coffee even more. Shown, from left, are Joaquin Zamora (director, Figaro Coffee Company), Irene Lucas (country operations manager, Figaro Coffee Company), and Karl Tan (Figaro Banawe franchisee).

BANK ACQUIRED ASSET FOR SALE

Location: Lot 4A & Lot 4B Magsaysay Avenue,
Brgy. Singcang-Airport, Bacolod City
TCT Nos.: 300827 & 300826
Description: (2) Vacant Commercial Lots
Total Area: 1,330.00 sqms. more or less
Indicative Selling Price: ₱8,478,750.00

* property is sold on an "as is where is" basis *
* subject to bank's evaluation and approval *
* subject to change without prior notice to the public *

For inquiries, please call:
UNITED COCONUT PLANTERS BANK
Asset Management and Disposition Division
Hotline No. 8119797

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JAC FILIPINAS PAWNSHOP, INC., 100 C. Palanca St., Quiapo, Manila will sell all unredeemed pledges for the months of June & July 2006 on Jan. 17, 2007 at 9 am.
J. Lanuza – *Auctioneer*
(PDI-Dec. 27, 2006)

POEA
24-HR
HOTLINES
722-1144
722-1155

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

Please be informed that **HONEY D. GALANG** is no longer connected with **COMPASS TRAVEL AND TOURS** effective **December 8, 2006**. Any transactions made with her after the said date will not be honored by our office. Thank you.

(PDI - Dec. 24, 27, 31, 2006 & Jan. 3, 2007)

Department of Social Welfare and Development
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION
Adoption, Resource and Referral Unit
389 San Rafael St., cor. Legarda, Manila

MEDIA PUBLICATION

The Department of Social Welfare and Development is calling the attention of Biological Parents who are the biological parent/s of the minor **Baby Boy aka Paulo Ezekiel Genove Pagatpatan.**

The biological parent/s may contact **Glenda M. Perla**, Social Worker of the Department of Social Welfare and Development – National Capital Region – Adoption, Resource and Referral Unit at 389 San Rafael St., cor. Legarda, Manila or contact her at telephone number 734-86-51.

(PDI – December 27, 2006)

SAVE COMPUTER
Everything your computer needs!
Christmas Promos!

P4 1.7Ghz 17" Digital Monitor w/ Keyboard & Mouse 11,950php	P3 800Mhz 15" Digital Monitor w/ Keyboard & Mouse 5,590php
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Marikina 933-6068	Cainta 647-6449	Gilmore(KPC) 412-5897	Angeles City 045-626-1487
Ortigas 717-1887	Ali Mall 438-7418	Gilmore(MP) 416-4117	Batangas City 043-980-2046
Recto 493-6502	Fairview 428-0832	Miranda Ave 454-3793	Calamba City 049-545-2367
Head Office 928-8280	Makati 886-4169	Makati Square 848-0893	Davao City 043-960227-6799

Office of the President
BCDA
Bases Conversion and Development Authority

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY

Republic of the Philippines

Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway Project

BCDA's Outsourcing of the Operation and Maintenance of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEx) from a Single Service Provider

1. The Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) intends to bid out the Contract for ***the BCDA's Outsourcing of the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEx) from a Single Service Provider*** (the "Contract"). An Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC) in the amount equal to 12.2% of the 10-year Projected Toll Revenues has been set aside to cover payments for the purpose. The Contract particularly involves the provision of the following support services: Toll Collection; Traffic Management; Roadway Maintenance; General Administration; and Greening and Landscaping. Bids received in excess of the ABC shall be automatically rejected at the opening of the financial proposals.

2. BCDA now calls for the submission of Letters of Intent (LOIs) from potential bidders to apply for eligibility. Interested firms may submit either in person, through mail or facsimile, their LOIs on 21 to 29 December 2006, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the address given below and secure the Eligibility Documents therefrom upon payment of a non-refundable fee in the amount of Pesos: Twenty-five Thousand only (PhP25,000.00). Application for eligibility will be evaluated on a "pass/fail" basis. The last day for the submission of the accomplished Eligibility Documents shall be 19 January 2007 until 12:00 noon, at the BCDA Corporate Center. Proponents are invited to witness the opening of the Eligibility Documents on 19 January 2007, 1:30 p.m. at the BCDA Corporate Center.

   Bases Conversion and Development Authority
   BCDA Corporate Center, 2/F Bonifacio Technology Center, 31st Street, Crescent Park West, Bonifacio Global City
   1634 Taguig City, Metro Manila

3. A Prequalification Conference among interested proponents is tentatively set on 04 January 2007, 10:00 a.m., at the BCDA Corporate Center. The BCDA Special Bids and Awards Committee (SBAC) shall draw up the prospective bidders from those who have submitted LOIs and have been determined as eligible. Bidding will be conducted through open competitive bidding procedures using non-discretionary pass/fail criteria.

4. Interested firms may obtain further information from:

   VICTOR V. ZABLAN
   Chairman, Special Bids and Award Committee for SCTEP
   Bases Conversion and Development Authority
   BCDA Corporate Center, 2/F Bonifacio Technology Center
   31st Street, Crescent Park West, Bonifacio Global City
   1634 Taguig City, Metro Manila
   Tel. No. 816-6666 loc. 110
   Website Address: www.bcda.gov.ph

   or contact Ms. Bambie L. Andal at telephone number 816-6666 loc. 124, facsimile no. 816-1043, or email address blandal@bcda.gov.ph.

5. The BCDA reserves the right to reject any and all bids, annul the bidding process or not award the contract, without incurring any liability to the affected bidder or bidders.

6. **THIS NOTICE HEREBY SUPERSEDES THE NOTICE ISSUED AND PUBLISHED ON 04 DECEMBER 2004 BY THE BCDA FOR THE BIDDING OF THE SAME CONTRACT.**

(Sgd.) VICTOR V. ZABLAN
Chairman, SBAC for SCTEP

(PDI--Dec. 21 & 27, 2006)

OBITUARIES

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
(2 Timothy 4)

GABRIEL ROMILLO FORMOSO

September 28, 1923 – December 25, 2006

Survived by **Billy** and **Chelo**, **Al** and **Marivic Perez**, **Vince** and **Dittas**, **Mike** and **Cheri**, **Greg** and **Ivy**, **Stella** and **Dong Capinpuyan**, and **Jojo**; grandchildren and great-grandchild; brothers **Vicente Jr.** and **Virgilio**; sisters **Mila F. Dolendo** and **Emma F. Lopez**; sisters-in-law **Rose Monroe** and **Becky Mañosa**.

His remains are at Don Bosco Chapels, Arnaiz Ave., Makati City, where a Mass will be celebrated at 7:00 p.m. today, December 27, 2006.

The funeral Mass will be at Don Bosco at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, December 28, 2006, after which interment will take place at Santuario de San Antonio, Forbes Park, Makati City.

An obituary with a picture can be a fitting tribute to your departed loved one.

Always caring...

INQUIRER OBITUARIES

OBITUARY REQUIREMENTS:
❶ Copy of Death Certificate
❷ Any identification document (I.D.)

ENGR. RODOLFO GALICIA HALLARE

Peacefully joined our Creator on December 25, 2006 at the age of 60.

A loving husband to his wife, Remy; a responsible father to his children, Jennifer & Romy, Jeffrey & Kate, Jelly & Jettsie; and a sweet grandfather to Jerome, Czarene, Gabriella, Gabriel, Jhake & Khloe.

The family, relatives and friends request the readers to join them in praying for his eternal happiness in heaven.

His body lies in state at the Holy Family Chapel, Our Lady of the Mount Carmel Shrine, New Manila, Quezon City.

Interment will be on Sunday, December 31, 2006 at Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina City after the 6:00 a.m. Mass.

"Even when I walk through a dark valley, I feel no harm. For you are at my side, your rod and staff give me courage..." Psalm 23:4

Death Notice

FR. GREGORIO BURT PEREZ DELEÑA III

Died on December 23, 2006 at the age of 44.

His body lies in state at Funeraria Imperial, Naga City.

Interment will be on December 30, 2006 at Sto. Niño Memorial Park, Naga City after the 1:00 p.m. Mass at Peñafrancia Church.

Message of Thanks

We, the loving wife, LOLITA;
children ROLANDO & MARY ANN, EDUARDO
& ELENA, ALBERTO, ROGER & MARILYN;
grandchildren and all relatives and good friends
of the late

KIONG CHUA

who joined our Creator on December 21, 2006
at the age of 83

wish to convey our heartfelt gratitude to all
who paid their last respect and grieved with us, offered
Masses and prayers, sent flowers, messages of sympathy,
kept vigil, joined the funeral rites and who in various
generous ways gave us comfort at the time
of our great loss and sorrow.

Our most sincere gratitude.

Mortuary and Crematory at The Heritage Park

More Classified Ads:
Department of Health
Provincial Government of Bukidnon
Municipality of Buguey
B8

PAMPERING.
WITH A PASSION.

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Marriott Hotel crowns the rich,
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The Residential Resort
at Newport City

The Metro's First and Only Luxury Resort Residences

Don't just rest—revitalize yourself. Don't just dine— feast. Don't just buy—shop in style. Don't just live—live it up! At The Residential Resort at Newport City, going where your heart leads you is an unwritten rule.

Here, the resort ambiance reveals itself in breathtaking ways. From your Lake Las Vegas-inspired, Mediterranean-style community. To villa-like executive studio to two-bedroom homes with wide windows and balconies that welcome sunlight, fresh air and the sweet scents of nature. To scores of fun amenities enveloping the homes. Play hard at the badminton courts, jogging paths, fitness station or putting green. Unwind at any of the pools. Or breathe easy at the playgrounds, picnic grounds, reflexology path or aviary.

Completing the resort atmosphere at Newport City are sprawling parks and verdant gardens. A picture-perfect, championship-level Villamor golf course. And a vibrant leisure complex overflowing with chic boutiques, restaurants, bars, cafés and fun outlets.

And with a Marriott Hotel literally at your backyard, you can kick back and enjoy the weekend in one of its well-appointed rooms. Rejuvenate yourself in a full-service health spa. And celebrate life's milestones in a fine-dining restaurant.

Experience Marriott's world-renowned hospitality in a unique resort setting. And enjoy pampering in its purest form. Here at The Residential Resort at Newport City.

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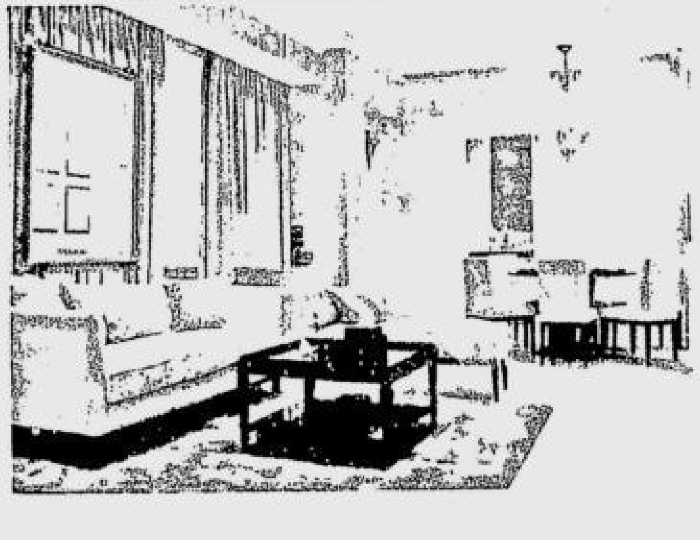

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Newport City Information Centre, Newport City, Pasay City, Metro Manila, Philippines
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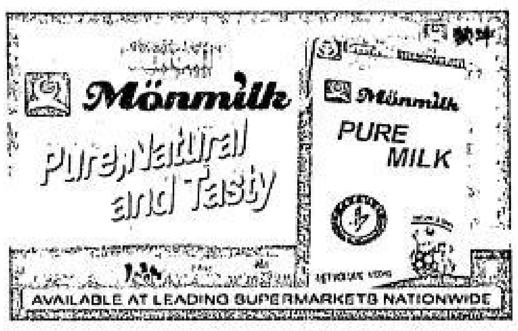
For Announcement Purposes Only

2bU! to be you • to be young • to be young • to be you • To be you!

LIFESTYLE

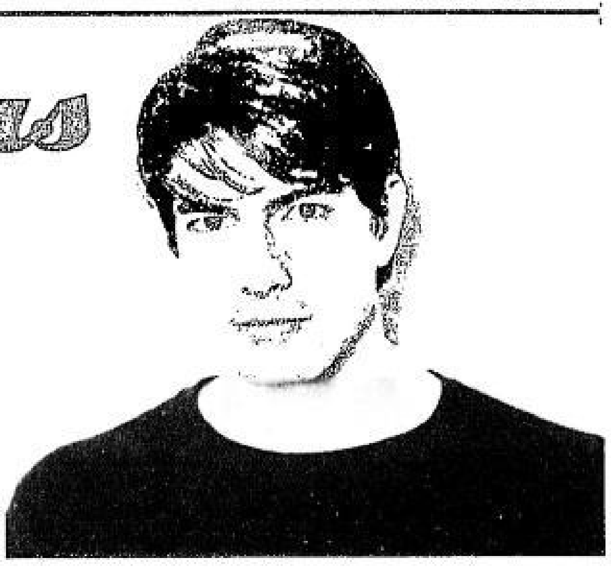
Editor **Chelo Banal-Formoso**
Chief of Correspondents **Pam Pastor**
sms feedback: inquirer life name/age/city/message to 2207 (Globe) and 386 (Smart) **or email us at** lifestyle@inquirer.com.ph

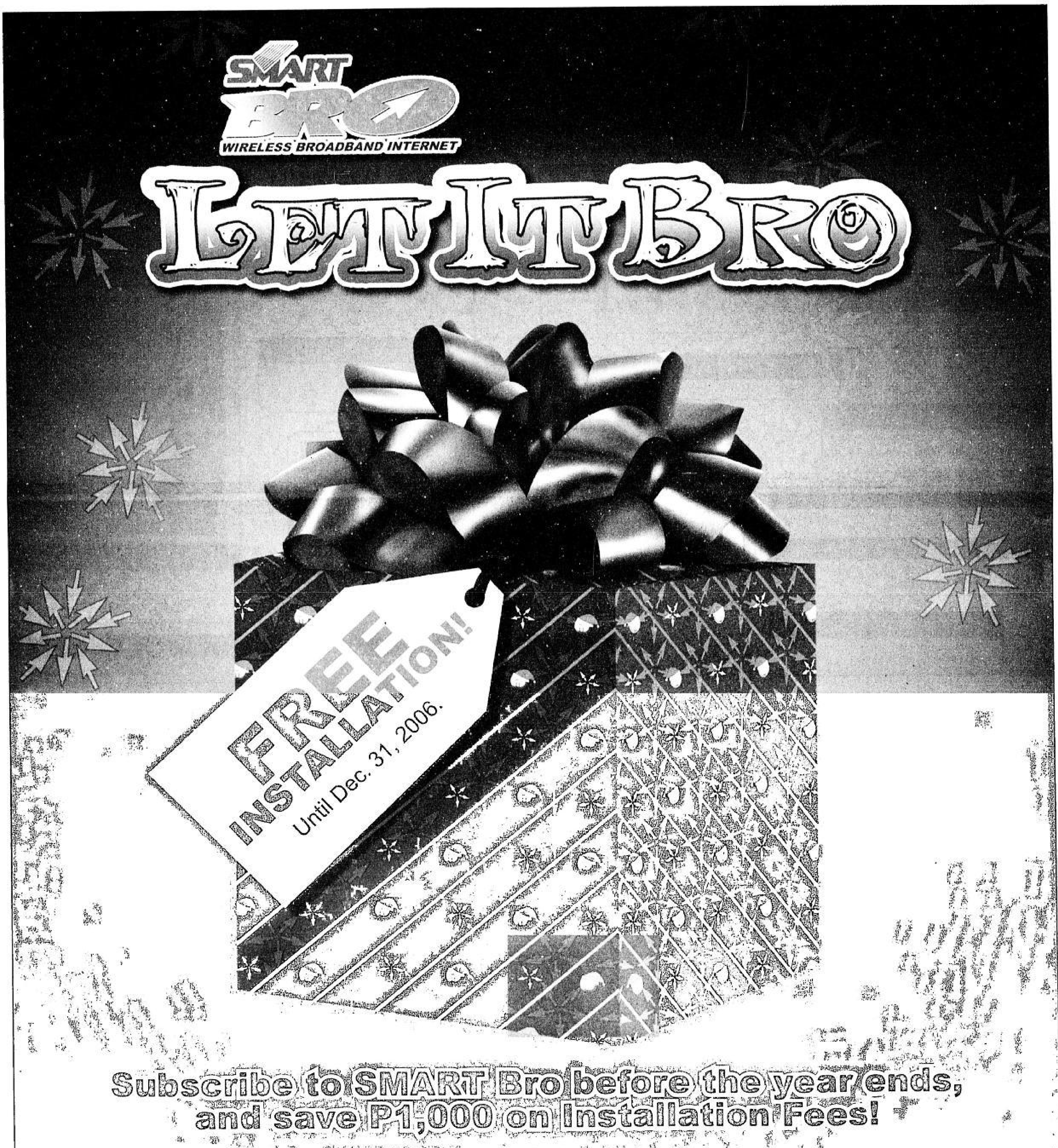


AVAILABLE AT LEADING SUPERMARKETS NATIONWIDE

The year that was

Before we say hello to 2007, 2bU! takes you on a ride through the year that was—the people, the places, the music, the fashion and the technology that made 2006 the awesome year that it was





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THE BEST OF 2006

You voted, we counted. Here are the results.

BEST BAND

Kamikazee rocked your 2006. OPM was big this year and you love it. Other favorite bands included Urbanddub, Up-Dharma Down, Bamboo and Itchyworms.

BEST SINGER

Sitti rules the airwaves, Manila's music nightspots—and the record sales. And you love Beyoncé too.

BEST CONCERT

Purrrrr. You thought Pussycat Dolls Live in Manila was hot, hot, hot.

BEST HAIRSTYLE

This year, you went for bangs.

BEST ACTOR AND ACTRESS

You loved Anne Hathaway as Andrea in "The Devil Wears Prada" and Leonardo DiCaprio in "The Departed." But when it comes to TV actors, you love Hugh Laurie from "House."

BEST TV SHOW

It doesn't matter whether you like "McDreamy" or "McSteamy," Grey's "Anatomy" was your favorite show of 2006.

BEST SONG

Kamikaze's "Narda" had you singing and rocking. You also liked Itchyworms' "Beer" and Join the Club's "Nobela."

BEST CINEMA

When there's a must-see movie, you say you head to Greenbelt 3. But you've also been loving your IMAX experience at the Mall of Asia.

BEST MOVIE

Another hurrah for books that are turned into movies. "The Devil Wears Prada" got your thumbs up.

THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA

BEST AUTHOR

In the absence of J.K. Rowling, you turned to Mitch Albom.

BEST RESTAURANT

You loved Heaven and Eggs and their angus beef tapa.

BEST DISH

You like your rice on the go. McDonald's Chicken Supreme McRice Burger got the nod this year.

BEST UAAP TEAM

You're still reeling from the win. The UST Growling Tigers were voted team of the year.

BEST NCAA TEAM

Seeing red. The San Beda Red Lions were your best NCAA team.

BEST FASHION DESIGNER

Kris Aquino loves her and so do you—Kate Torralba was your favorite designer of 2006.

BEST MODELS

Couple Borgy and Ornusa ruled your ramp this year.

BEST COMMERCIAL

Fita commercials kept you from switching the channel.

BEST RADIO STATION and BEST DJs

It's a double dose of honor for RX 93.1. They were voted best station of 2006 and Chico and Delamar were lauded as the year's best DJs.

BEST MUSIC CHANNEL

You said MTV kept you glued to your screen.

BEST BOOK

Because there was no Harry Potter release this year, 2bU! readers went for many different books but a lot of you agreed on "For One More Day."

BEST TV CHANNEL

Action keeps you awake. AXN was your favorite TV channel for 2006.

BEST TREND

Sugar high. We never thought donuts would ever be called a trend. You still love your Havaianas but at the last quarter of the year, you gave your attention to a sweet, sweet trend—Krispy Kremes.

Krispy Kreme
DOUGHNUTS

BEST ACCESSORY

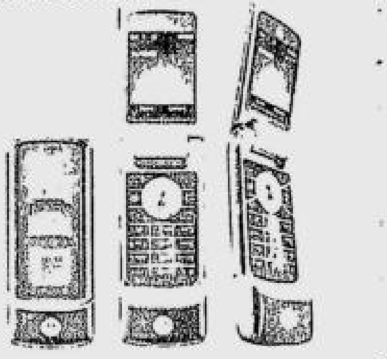
Leggings are number one for you.

BEST SHOP

You think of it as one giant shop. Mall of Asia was one of your favorite shopping stops for 2006.

BEST GADGET

Two gadgets took your breath away—the iPod in all its forms and the Moto Krazr.



BEST MAGAZINE

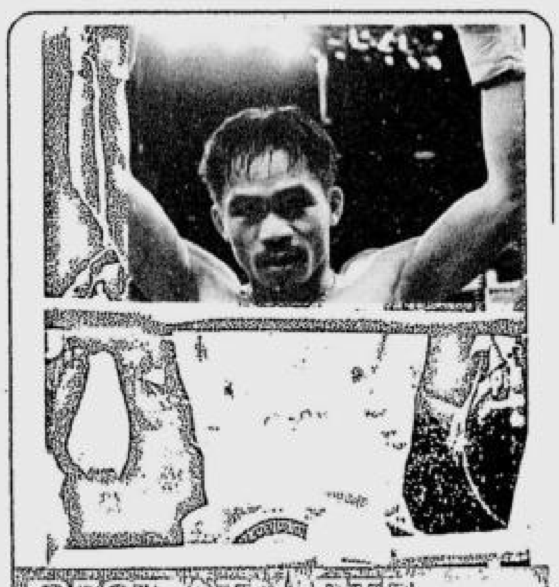
Preview and FHM flew off the magazine stands this year.

BEST BRAND

Bench still rules but you also loved Lacoste this year.

BEST WEBSITE

You can't decide. You still love Friendster but you love YouTube as well.



BEST ATHLETE

No doubt about it, you like how he throws his punches. Manny Pacquiao is your athlete of the year.

BEST FITNESS REGIMEN

Walking is great exercise, according to you.

Music and madness

Text and photos by Maui V. Reyes

FROM SOPHOMORE RECORDS (HALE, Kjwan) to sudden line-up shuffles (Sugarfree, anyone?), band-breakups (bye bye, Twisted Halo) to bad albums (we're not naming any!), and floozy festivals (Fete dela Musique) to concerts with a cause (RockEd events), 2006 spewed out more Pinoy music madness to quench anyone's thirst.

We asked some of music's in-the-know peeps what they thought was the best and worst in music this year. Care for another sip?

"Best: Lokomotiv and the return of Razorback! Worst: continued buying of pirated CDs of local acts by fellow Pinoys."—Silverfilter, Lovecore

"Best is the new Beck album. Probably the worst is Paris Hilton."—Diego Mapa, Monsterbot and Pedicab

"Best album, 'Noontime Show' by Itchyworms! Best event…Rockestra!"—Chino, Silent Sanctuary

"2006 was an awesome year for both good and awful rock bands!"—Kris Gorra-Dancel, Cambio

"The best things: Turbulence productions, Kerplunk! Studios, Circus, Tower of Doom, Baranggay Tibay!"—Reg Rubio, Greyhoundz

"The best would be the MTV Music Summit. The worst would be the Rakrakan…6 people dead."—Inky de Dios, Brigada

"As predicted, the current state of OPM has not been as exciting as the past two to three years. With less than impressive follow-up albums and singles as well as gigs, local rock IT bands have not given the same kind of excitement that was expected from them during last year's OPM boom. This is not to say that rock music is out. The big sellers this year in Philippine music were definitely revivals done by contemporary rock bands. First came the Sony BMG's Eraserheads' tribute 'Ultraelectromagneticjam,' then Universal Music's 'Kami nAPO Muna' and finally Viva's 'Hopia, Mani, Popcorn: The Best of Manila Sound.' Seems like everyone is capitalizing on the 'rockin' revivals' trend which should end with the Manila Sound album. It's a great idea to reintroduce these songs to the new generation, but frankly these songs should aim to make kids curious about the original songs and scour the record stores to discover the golden years of Pinoy music. Nothing compares to the original versions (some bands really butchered these songs!).

This year also saw record companies riding on the Bossa Nova trend, with Sitti's 'Café Bossa' leading the way. However, like most trends it's predicted to become dormant by 2007. The local music industry is now wide open for the 'next big thing'; we've been through ballads, novelty, acoustic, R&B, rock and bossa nova. What's next? Right now, nobody knows.

On the international front… Finally, 2006 saw the release of highly-anticipated albums from overseas superstars. John Mayer's fusion of blues and rock in 'Continuum' was one of this year's most lauded, garnering perfect reviews from international and local publications alike. My Chemical Romance's 'The Black Parade' made nay-sayers eat their words, with the album moving smoothly from one-dimensional emo to experimental (Queen plus Liza Minelli with death as a main subject is pretty darn interesting). Muse's fourth album 'Black Holes and Revelations' has made the British lads practically a household name, and the new Incubus album 'Light Grenades' saw the band veering away from 2004's confused 'Crow' and revisiting their 'Morning View' sound.

The year's underrated debut was by James Morrison. His first release, 'Undiscovered,' went virtually, well, 'undiscovered' by the masses, but it's certainly one worth checking out—yet another 'all killer, no filler' CD.

Josh Groban's third album 'Awake' is topping the charts for a good reason: his sound is edgier (the result of collaborations with Imogen Heap and Ladysmith Black Mambazo) but still retains his unique pop-classical appeal.

2005's multiple-Grammy winner John Legend's 'Once Again' proved that the sophomore slump was not applicable to him. He went back to old-school R&B, a sound that had been neglected on Top 40 radio in recent years.

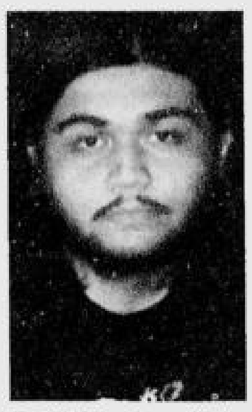
And of course, pop had its hey-day, too, this year. BEP and PCD garnered back-to-back concerts and multiplatinum sales, Beyoncé and Justin still ruled the airwaves, and Paris Hilton, for a few months at least, fooled everyone into thinking that she actually had a singing career (thank you, Scott Storch)."—Jade Maravillas, SONY-BMG Label Manager

JOREL Corpuz, Happy Meals and Kjwan

EBE Dancel, Sugarfree

We asked some of music's in-the-know peeps what they thought were the best and worst in local music this year

JADE Maravillas, SONY-BMG Philippines Label Manager



ROLL Martinez, Hale

"Best album: Captain's 'This is Hazelville.' Worst album: Metallica's 'St. Anger.' Best event: my getting a ps3 on my birthday. Worst: two weeks after the Waltz shoot."—Roll Martinez, Hale

"Best: The first Philippine International Jazz Festival last January, Sergio Mendes' album, 'Timeless,' POT's reunion at '70s Bistro, and the Bossa Nova explosion!"—Tedmark Cruz, Happy Meals

"Best thing was that I got to open my indie label and the release of Kjwan's '2 Step Marv.' The worst thing is the closing of MTV Philippines."—Wally Chamsay, Mobile Industry Executive

"The best thing was Terno Records! Up Dharma Down's 'Fragmented' and Outerhope's 'Strangely Paired' were the best Filipino albums of the year! While Ang Bandang Shirely's self-titled debut was my favorite EP! The worst thing was the load of disappointing new albums by my favorite bands like The Still's 'Without Feathers,' The Strokes' 'First Impressions of the Earth' and the horrible horrible 'Sam's Town' by The Killers!"—Quark Henares, Blast Ople and music video director

"The best would be Sino Sikat? and Up Dharma Down!"—Simon Nuñez, Shirley and the Insects

"My best album would be 'Noontime Show' by the Itchyworms! The details of this release were excellent from the message to the musicality to the studio elements."—Jorel Corpuz, Kjwan and Happy Meals

"The best in music was Kamikazee and the Apo tribute album!"—Marc Abaya, Kjwan

"I honestly and objectively think Up Dharma Down's 'Fragmented' is the best album of 2006. The worst in music 2006 is the ongoing BS onslaught where everyone is 1. A DJ, or 2. A true house aficionado and yet it's still trance, crappy Euro dance, or, ahem, 'deep house' with formula female vocal sing-along pop ditties that these 'DJs' play or what one dances to in the many 'hip,' 'cosmopolitan' clubs in the city. Thick skinned, thick-faced charlatans who prop themselves up as something they're not."—Toti Dalmacion, Music Freak of Terno Recordings and Groove Nation

"Best: The APO Tribute and 'Narda' by Kamikazee. Worst: the loss of 103.5 K-Lite."—Mark Escueta, Rivermaya

"Best: 'Boom Tarat Tarat!' Kasi masaya!"—Yan Yuzon, Pupil

"Best: the bands. Worst: 'Boom Tarat Tarat.'"—Jay Contreras, Kamikazee

"More bands are touring the country these days. We hope to see more of that next year. And the best CD was The Beatles' 'Love.'"—Ebe Dancel, Sugarfree

"The best was music videos by Pancho Esguerra and Marie Jamora! World-class and awe-inspiring! The worst would be the budgets given to music video directors!"—Wincy, music video director

"The music scene brought people together in a big way. Diversity isn't an issue anymore. That's probably the best thing that happened in 2006 for me."—Armi Millare, Up Dharma Down

"Best CDs: Sugarfree, Kamikazee, Parokya ni Edgar, Kami nAPO album (the Pinoy rocks once again!). Best event: Black Eyed Peas and Pussycat Dolls concerts (Pinoys rock the world stage). Worst event: Britney becomes single (her internet photos are TOXIC!)"—Jamir, Slapshock

"The worst even this year would be the Wowowee stampede. The worst album would be all those *artistas* coming out with crappy dance albums!"—Gab Alipe, Urbandub

Loving the limelight

By Niño Mark M. Sablan
2bU! Correspondent

IN THE LOCAL MOVIE INDUSTRY, it usually takes so much before one gets the proper recognition befitting a true star.

However, nowadays, with the proliferation of reality shows and contests, one simple answer to an interview question, one controversial deed or even one simple song can propel an unknown to unexpected stardom. Just look at our examples.

Andrew Wolff

Getting bad press for his alleged beating of actress and then-girlfriend Gwen Garci and his supposed "using" of Keanna Reeves, Andrew grew even more infamous when he participated in a celebrity boxing match. Supposedly cheating during his match with Rommel Montano, brother of actor Cesar, Andrew almost got down and dirty with the actor. Andrew said he was ready for a rematch or for a cleaner fight, but not a lot of people were interested to watch that anymore.

Kris Aquino

How to become more famous when you're a super big star already? Secretly get married, and then come out with it, and then get pregnant. That is exactly what our favorite Presidential daughter did.

Iwa Moto

It didn't take long for "Starstruck" runner-up Iwa Moto to score roles in several shows and ink a couple of endorsements. And now that she has just been sexily featured as the cover girl of a men's magazine, her number of male fans have probably tripled. Many fans loved her the moment she showed her true self: a vocal and carefree wild child who seemed to flirt with intrigues always. In 2007, her name, I predict, will be even bigger, although I'm not so sure if it would be good or bad press for her.

Rustom Padilla

He didn't win in the Philippines' version of "Big Brother," but he emerged triumphant in the end: as a gay man who finally came out of the closet and who could now be accepted and loved for his truest, most real self. Rustom is definitely back in the biz, and can now be seen in the "Zsa Zsa Zaturnnah" movie with Zsa Zsa Padilla.

Mau Marcelo

Sure, she sounds like your next-door African-American. Sure, she belts out the typical and expected Mariah and Whitney songs as contest pieces. Sure, she can hit those high notes just like many other Filipinos. But she's the first-ever Philippine Idol, so she has a place in this list.

Erik Santos

When Erik and sexy comedienne Rufa Mae Quinto admitted they were a couple, many people raised their eyebrows. Why? Because many people believe Erik is gay. They think that it's just a ploy to further these two stars' individual careers. However, Erik and Rufa Mae claim they do love one another, and that they are very much together as a romantic couple.

Borgy Manotoc

Borgy may be out there every night partying and attending the country's hottest events, but he's not *out there*, if you get what I mean. But when he guested on the controversial talk show of DJ Mo Twister, Borgy finally got a taste of the rough life when he dropped names such as Vina Morales alongside words like sex. If that's not enough, he allegedly had a fistfight with singer Jay-R early this year. All these, plus those rumors of him running for public office!

Mo Twister

Congratulations to DJ Mo Twister for making the most successful comeback of the year with his radio show on 89.9 called "Good Times with Mo Twister."

With all the questions he's been asking his guests (plus the juicy answers, of course!), Mo has definitely added some spice to the local celebrity scene, by simply asking the questions everyone wants to ask but can't.

MAU Marcelo

ALYSSA Alano

Alyssa Alano

Mention the song "Kiss Me" to any Internet head and chances are it's synonymous to starlet Alyssa Alano, now dubbed the Internet Diva by many. She skyrocketed to fame with a performance of the said song peppered with horrible pronunciation on GMA 7's "Walang Tulugan with Master Showman."

That clip was uploaded to YouTube, but with accompanying lyrics intentionally spelled out incorrectly based on her pronunciation. A million clicks after, Alyssa is now a mainstay of several shows on GMA. She's capitalizing on her, uhm, English-speaking skills, so expect her to use the language all the time.

E-mail the author at marksablan_2bu@yahoo.com

MO TWISTER (above) and Kris Aquino

Motorola iDJ:
Iconic Archetypes

Now on its second year, the Motorola iDJ has spread its influence to greater heights, tapping more people from the kaleidoscope world of music, fashion, school, and the media.

Tagged as **"iDJ2: The Rise of the MOTOROKR iDJs"**, the search aimed to ensnare the country's best and brightest DJs, with the help of the MOTOROKR E2 handset. With the amazing Bluetooth technology equipped in the MOTOROKR E2, the participants used the phone to spin their music. It is this feature that gave birth to the iDJ concept, having amateur DJs play songs using the MOTOROKR E2 in a wild and wicked competition that only Motorola could put together. The winner on each night of the iDJ series went home with a MOTOROKR E2.

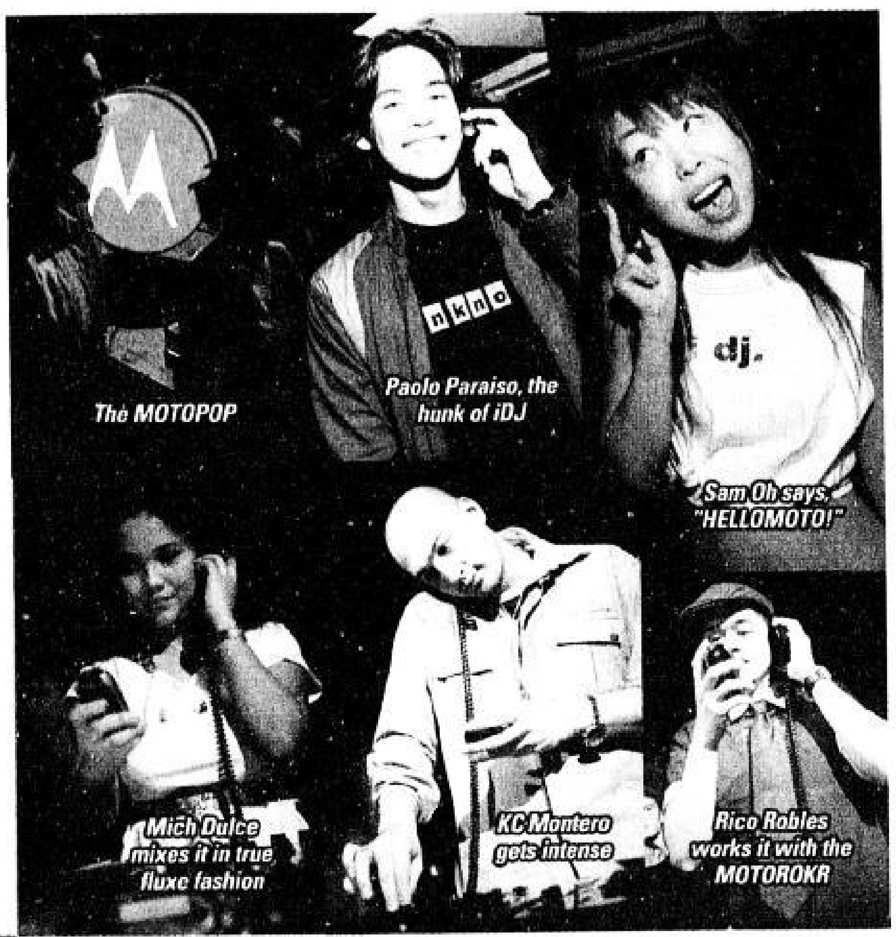
Media Mixology. Teatrino Promenade, Greenhills. The launch night gathered top society media such as JR Isaac (Phil. Star), Karla Alindahao (Phil. Tatler), RJ Ledesma (Manual), Bea Constantino (Chalk) and Tals Diaz (Phil. Daily Inquirer). RJ Ledesma hyped the crowd by playing all-time favorite 80s music. This eventually earned him to be the night's iDJ.

Next Gen. Embassy Super Club VIP, The Fort. From Media to the Next Generation, the 2nd of the 4 part series included campus icons such as Michelle Pamintuan, Manika Yujuico, Luke Orbos, Gian Sim and JP Sacaben. The night's winner was JP Sacaben, having had almost half of the Embassy crowd cheering for his hard house music, to which he was offered a gig in Embassy after this.

Fashion Mix-Match. Embassy Super Club VIP, The Fort. From the media to the next-gens, Motorola hosted the fashionistas. Heralding their esteemed style were Bubbles Paraiso, Charmaine Palermo, Pheomela Barranda, Tessa Dragon and Robby Mananquil. Playing a combination of hip hop, jazz, electronica and metal, it was Robby's turn to bring home that MOTOROKR E2.

Celebrity Spin. Embassy Super Club VIP, The Fort. The culminating night of the iDJ series was graced by Paolo Paraiso, Mich Dulce, Rico Robles, KC Montero and Sam Oh. In the end, with the 90s music as his repertoire, chosen as the top among the contenders was Paolo Paraiso.

From last year's use of a specific music genre as the competition's thematic concept, Motorola found a way of expanding its reach by gathering people because of their iconic archetypes. Having them party all-night in the hottest party places, the night was surely made more fun because of the unique way of music spinning. Thanks to MOTOROKR E2.


The MOTOPOP
Paolo Paraiso, the hunk of iDJ
Sam Oh says, "HELLOMOTO!"
Mich Dulce mixes it in true fluxc fashion
KC Montero gets intense
Rico Robles works it with the MOTOROKR

You can do it, Tals!
RJ Ledesma even stuns himself!
JR Isaac on an iDJ high
MOTO's Mari Litonjua up close and personal
iDJ: Enough said
Spinning solo: Bea Constantino
Karla Alindahao sexes up in the spotlight
The media iDJs who work hard and party harder: Bea Constantino, Karla Alindahao, RJ Ledesma, JR Isaac and Tals Diaz

iDJ goes glam with Charmaine Palermo, Bubbles Paraiso, Tessa Dragon, MOTO'S Mari Litonjua, Robby Mananquil and Phoem Barranda
JP Sacaben lives it up
Michelle Pamintuan gets a kick out of the MOTOROKR
Tessa Dragon: iDJ Eye Candy
Phoem goes one-on-one with the MOTOROKR
All eyes on Bubbles Paraiso
Robby Mananquil was made for the MOTOROKR
Cool hand Luke
Gian Sim rocks to the tune of iDJ
Manika makes her mark
Embassy Super Clubgoers get a taste of the iDJs
You can't see it now but Charmaine Palermo can dance too!
No pom-poms were in sight but Paolo Trillo and Rissa Samson were cheering their iDJ friends on

2006 scene-stealers

By Niño Mark M. Sablan
2bU! Correspondent

HOLLYWOOD IS OVERFLOWING with interesting and headline-worthy personalities. Everyone is famous for a particular reason.

But whenever a year is about to end, it is always easy to single out the seriously controversial and most-talked-about ones, thanks to their romantic lives (marriage, divorce, separation), life-altering decisions (surgery) and interesting contribution to the industry (mugshots, boo-boos and sex scandals!).

Here are some names that would forever be synonymous with 2006.

Shiloh Nouvel Jolie-Pitt

Born in Namibia last May 27, the first biological child of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie was introduced to the world via exclusive and expensive photos that were featured on the British Hello! and the US mag People (and also leaked on the Internet).

BABY vanity. Suri Cruise

Suri Cruise

Born last April 18, Suri is famous not just because her parents are Katie Holmes and Tom Cruise, but because she was kept away from the public and "introduced" only six months later through the October 2006 issue of Vanity Fair, with Annie Leibovitz-shot photos of the family.

Joseph Barbera

One half of the duo responsible for cartoons such as "The Flintstones," "Yogi Bear" and "Scooby-Doo," Joseph Barbera passed away this month at the age of 95.

Steve Irwin

The "Crocodile Hunter" host sadly passed away last Sept. 4 when a stingray barb pierced his chest while he was filming a documentary on Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Aaron Spelling

The man behind such iconic hit shows as "Charlie's Angels," "Dynasty" and "Starsky and Hutch" passed away at his Los Angeles home this December. The father of actress Tori—better known as Donna in the 90's teen show "Beverly Hills 90210"—Aaron was 83 when he died.

SAD ENDING. Steve Irwin

Lance Bass

OUT OF the closet. Lance Bass

Appearing on the cover of People Magazine with "I'm Gay" as the main blurb, Bass revealed in the interview that during his days with N'Sync, he didn't want to overpower everything by telling people he was gay. Lance is going out with Reichen Lehmkuhl of the "Amazing Race" fame.

Neil Patrick Harris

Harris, more popularly known as that kid genius in the '90s show "Doogie Howser, MD," also admitted he was gay to People Magazine.

"I am happy to dispel any rumors or misconceptions and am quite proud to say that I am a very content gay man living my life to the fullest, and I feel most fortunate to be working with wonderful people in the business I love."

Daniel Craig

A loooot of James Bond fans weren't delighted with the new actor cast to play 007. But while Bond lost viewers, Craig gained some fans as well for his darker, more gritty take on the famous movie character.

Brandon Routh

Brandon was a semi-unknown before winning the Superman tights, but many were won over when they saw Routh in the movie. Said director Bryan Singer: "Brandon is an extremely fine actor who possesses the physical qualifications of Clark Kent/Superman. But he also embodies the legacy and history of this character in a way that makes me certain he's the right choice."

Taylor Hicks

Named by People Magazine as the hottest bachelor of the year, Taylor the Soul Patrol was this year's American Idol.

Ozzy Lusth

Even before joining the reality show "Survivor: Cook Islands" (where he was a runner-up), Ozzy was already a reality-TV star via Playboy TV's "Foursome," dubbed "the only TV dating program that shows everything." And when they say everything, they mean everything. Video clips of Ozzy in the nude are floating in cyberspace.

Nicole Richie

Upstaging the Olsen twins, Kate Bosworth and Lindsay Lohan when it came to weight loss this year, Nicole's thinness hugely bothered loved ones, fans and everyone else who saw her in her full skin-and-bones self.

Lindsay Lohan

Branded by rich, oily-skinned brat Brandon Davis as "firecrotch," La Lohan made a lot of headlines in 2006 because of her romantic relationships, her weight loss and alleged drug use.

Paris Hilton

Our fave heiress is the Celebrity of 2006 for her transformation into a recording artist. Sure, "Stars Are Blind" sounded like a poor copy of Gwen Stefani, while "Nothing in This World" seemed like a Kylie Minogue rip-off. But let's admit it—many sang along to Paris, who could actually carry a tune.

Ashlee Simpson

Jessica's little sis took over the stage from her this year. After her overrated lip-synching "Saturday Night Live" episode in 2004, Ashlee was louder this year with her rhinoplasty in April and her decision to reject Playboy's $4 million offer to pose for the men's magazine.

Britney Spears

The Princess of Pop made mommy mistakes in private, got pregnant to baby number two, and after her divorce from Kevin Federline, was recently photographed climbing in and out of cars wearing no underwear, together with her new friend, Paris Hilton.

Kevin Federline

Britney finally dumped him, and lots of people applauded. He was also whiplashed for his "Lose Control" performance at the 2006.Teen Choice Awards.

E-mail the author at marksablan_2bu @yahoo.com

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- FM Stereo Radio
- MMS / WAP 2.0 / Java
- Speakerphone

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- To do List, Alarm Clock, Voice Memo, Calculator, Currency Exchange, Calendar
- WAP 1.2 / MMS

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2bU! to be you • to be young • to be you • To be you! LIFESTYLE

The year that was in fashion

By Bianca Consunji
2bU! Correspondent

THE PAST YEAR WAS DECIDEDLY MORE EXperimental, fashion-wise. There were fewer shirts and jeans and more dresses, shorts and skirts. Finally, people were learning to dress up.

One of the most notable trends of 2006 was the return of the '80s: Leggings in all fabrics and colors came back with a vengeance. Worn with tunics, dresses, wide belts and boots, leggings were most noticeable. Other notable '80s throwbacks included off-shoulder tops, miniskirts and chunky jewelry. However, bubble skirts, another '80s staple, were less visible this year.

Casual became the new formal as shorts were not limited to the house and beach. Women wore Bermuda shorts paired with dressy tops, heels, and lots of accessories to night-outs and formal occasions. Skinny jeans also became mainstream, as more people abandoned their trusty old flares for something more hip.

Mid-2006 showed some nautical influences, as sailor stripes, khaki and smartly tailored pants made their way to store windows. But polka dots proved to be more

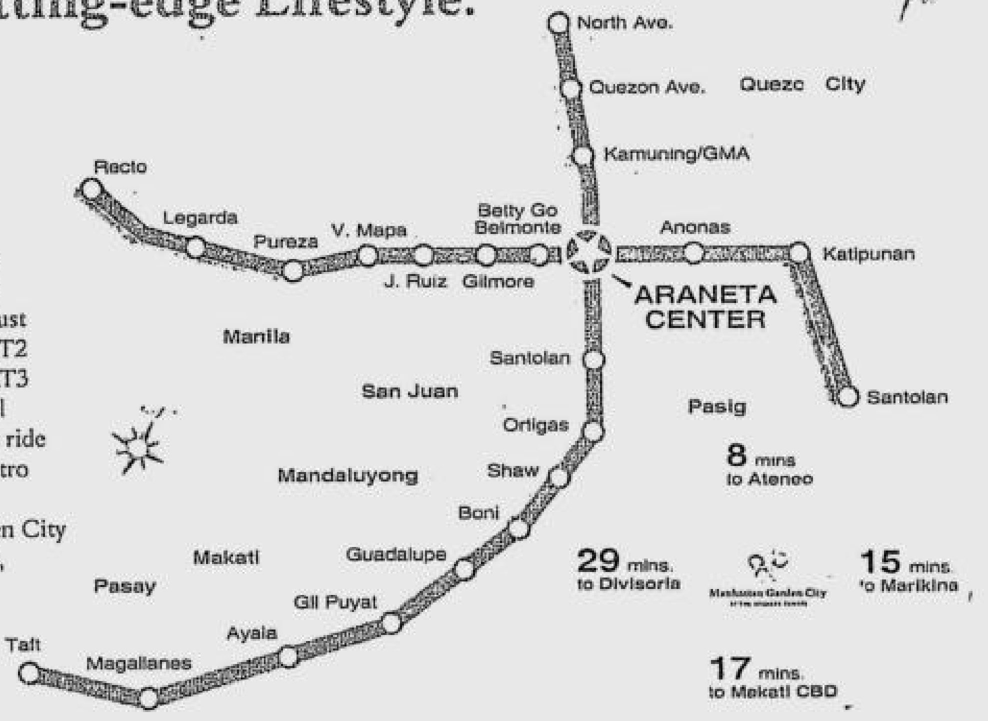
THE YEAR/ D3

There were fewer shirts and jeans and more dresses, shorts, and skirts in 2006

RETRO-INSPIRED polka dots were the rage.

Manhattan Garden City
AT THE ARANETA CENTER

Connecting You to the Metro's Most Important Destinations. *And* to a Cutting-edge Lifestyle.



The Manhattan Garden City is the country's first transit-oriented development, linking you to not just one but two train systems: the LRT2 along Aurora Boulevard. And MRT3 along EDSA. So you're just a stroll away from a quick and traffic-free ride to virtually all major points of Metro Manila.

What's more, Manhattan Garden City connects you to the shops, offices, restaurants and entertainment centers at the Araneta Center. So you can live, shop, play and move like never before.

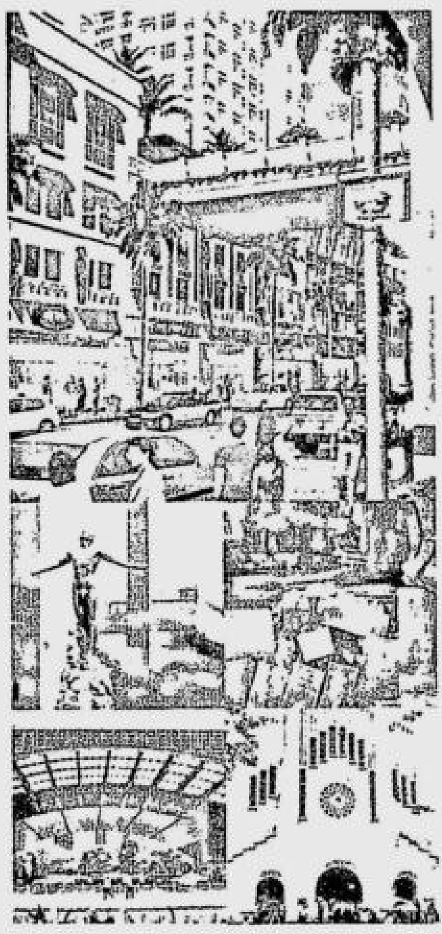
Easy ride around the metro.

A **729-meter-long footbridge** standing four stories above the streets interconnects all 20 residential towers of your community. And leads you straight to the LRT2 and MRT3. There are lush greenery and benches. So going to the train stations is as enjoyable as a walk in the park.

With the trains close by, the power to go places is yours. Your children can be in Ateneo or UP in Quezon City in just 8 minutes via the LRT2. Or Manila's university belt in 19 minutes.

Your wife can get to Divisoria's bargain stores in 29 minutes. While you can be in your office in Ortigas in 6 minutes, Ayala Avenue in 17 minutes or Taft Avenue in 22 minutes through the MRT3. And since both lines link up with the LRT1, you can reach many more places in the metro than ever before.

This means you spend *less* time on the road. And *more* fun time with family and friends.



Easy link to the Araneta Center.

Manhattan Garden City enjoys direct access to the giant playground that's the Araneta Center. Your entry point is a **four-level transfer station** with a hotel-style lobby, grand staircase and four passenger elevators. The station connects you at the third level to the Gateway Mall and its Oasis floating garden. From there, you're just steps away from Rustan's, SM, Shopwise, Ali Mall, Farmers Plaza and the iconic Araneta Coliseum.

Manhattan Parkway
Paradise in the Sky

Manhattan Parkway Residences
at the Manhattan Garden City, Araneta Center

Manhattan Garden City welcomes you to its first phase: Manhattan Parkway. Take your pick of cozy executive studios and relaxing one-bedroom suites housed in three towers. With sweeping views of the Araneta Center and Manila Bay. At the fourth-story garden deck, enjoy the trellised walkways, jogging trails, fitness station, indoor sauna/spa and gym. And you're just a footbridge away from more play amenities—and more fun—at the upcoming phases.

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A NEW ERA IN AFFORDABLE HOME FINANCING

Now, you can own a luxurious studio at Manhattan Parkway
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P10,246 a month fixed for 20 years.

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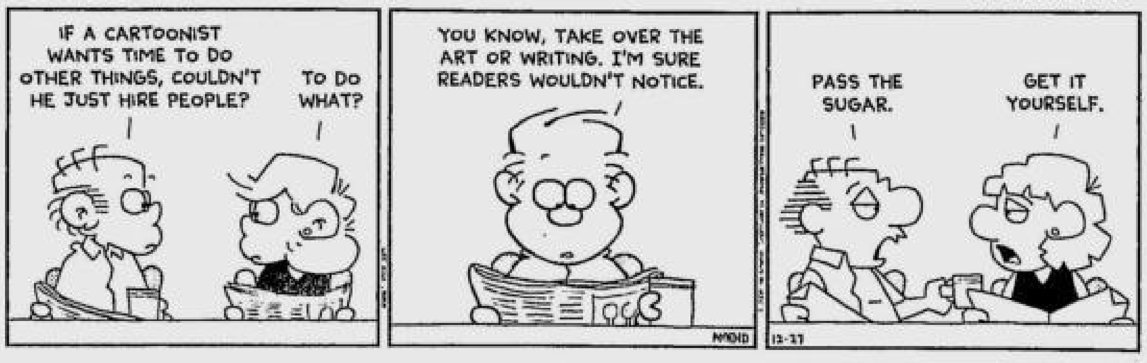
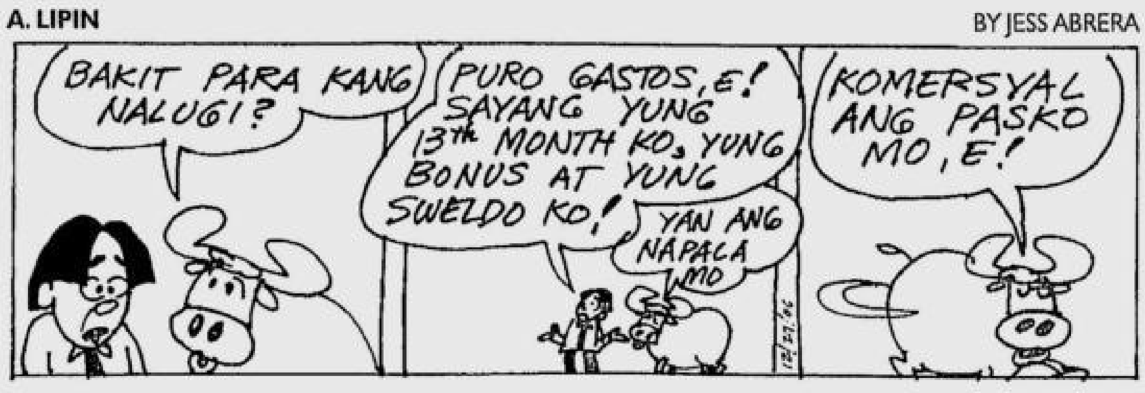
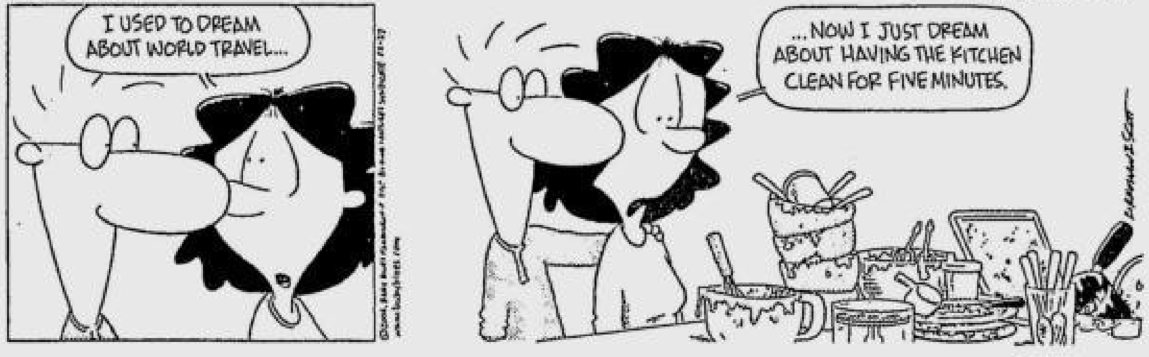

IF A CARTOONIST WANTS TIME TO DO OTHER THINGS, COULDN'T HE JUST HIRE PEOPLE?
TO DO WHAT?
YOU KNOW, TAKE OVER THE ART OR WRITING. I'M SURE READERS WOULDN'T NOTICE.
PASS THE SUGAR.
GET IT YOURSELF.
12-27

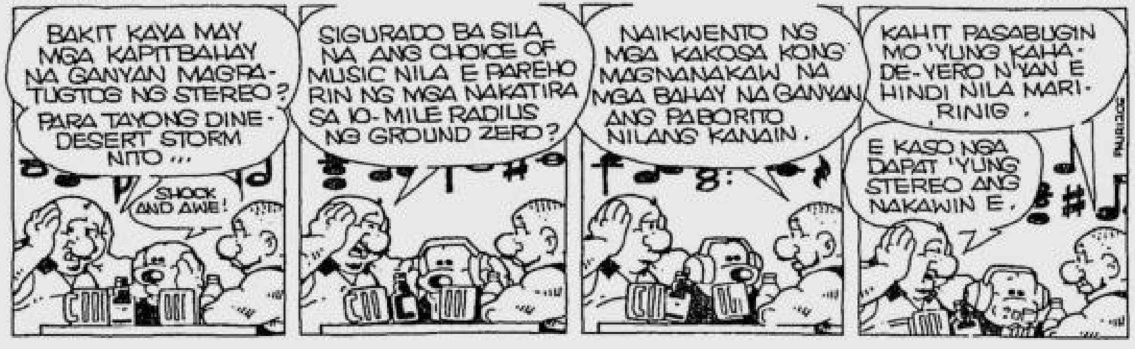
A. LIPIN BY JESS ABRERA


BAKIT PARA KANG NALUGI?
PURO GASTOS, E! SAYANG YUNG 13th MONTH KO, YUNG BONUS AT YUNG SWELDO KO!
YAN ANG NAPALA MO
KOMERSYAL ANG PASKO MO, E!
12-27-06

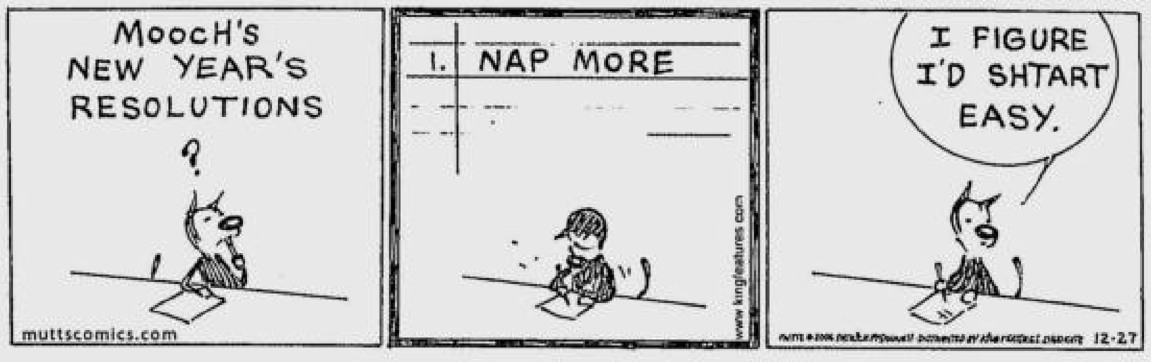
BABY BLUES BY JERRY SCOTT


I USED TO DREAM ABOUT WORLD TRAVEL...
...NOW I JUST DREAM ABOUT HAVING THE KITCHEN CLEAN FOR FIVE MINUTES.

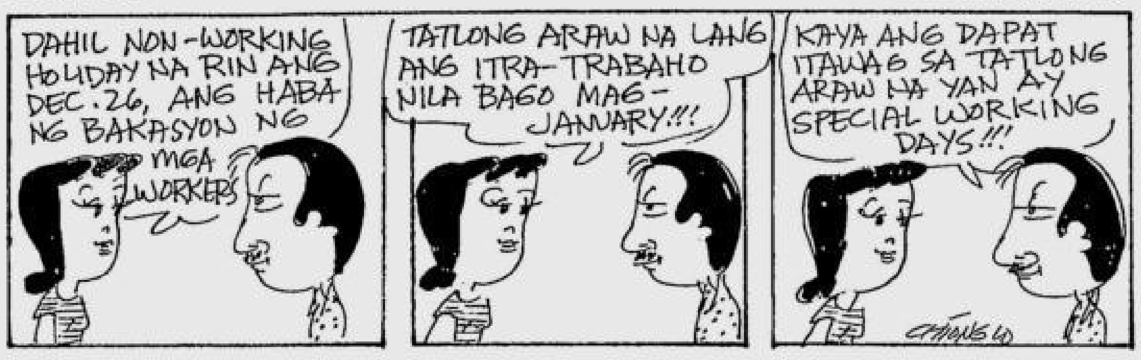
PUGAD BABOY BY P.M. JUNIOR


BAKIT KAYA MAY MGA KAPITBAHAY NA GANYAN MAGPA-TUGTOG NG STEREO?
PARA TAYONG DINE-DESERT STORM NITO...
SHOCK AND AWE!
SIGURADO BA SILA NA ANG CHOICE OF MUSIC NILA E PAREHO RIN NG MGA NAKATIRA SA 10-MILE RADIUS NG GROUND ZERO?
NAIKWENTO NG MGA KAKOSA KONG MAGNANAKAW NA MGA BAHAY NA GANYAN ANG PABORITO NILANG KANAIN.
KAHIT PASABUGIN MO 'YUNG KAHA-DE-YERO N'YAN E HINDI NILA MARI-RINIG.
E KASO NGA DAPAT 'YUNG STEREO ANG NAKAWIN E.

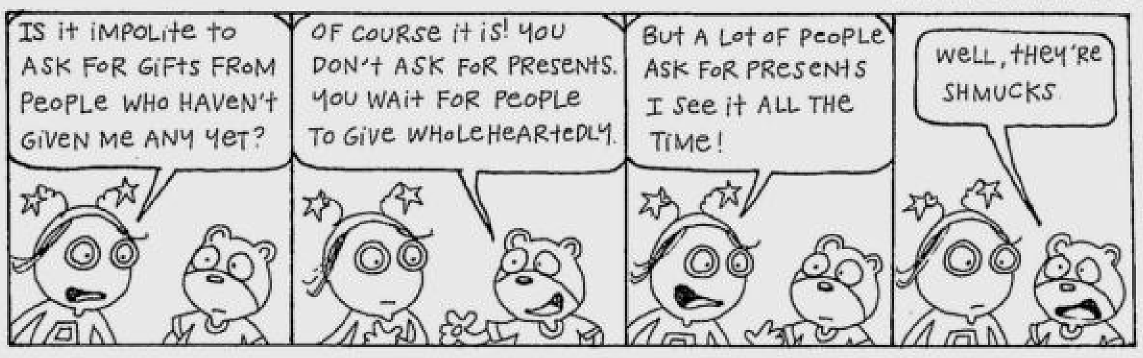
MUTTS BY PATRICK McDONNELL


MOOCH'S NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS
?
1. NAP MORE
I FIGURE I'D SHTART EASY.
muttscomics.com
www.kingfeatures.com
12-27

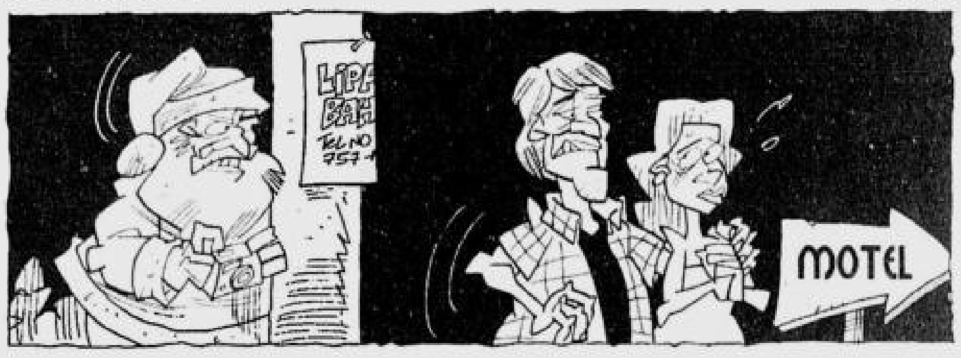
LOVEKNOTS BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


DAHIL NON-WORKING HOLIDAY NA RIN ANG DEC. 26, ANG HABA NG BAKASYON NG MGA WORKERS
TATLONG ARAW NA LANG ANG ITRA-TRABAHO NILA BAGO MAG-JANUARY!!!
KAYA ANG DAPAT ITAWAG SA TATLONG ARAW NA YAN AY SPECIAL WORKING DAYS!!!
CHIONGLO

ATOMO AND WEBOY BY LYRA GARCELLANO

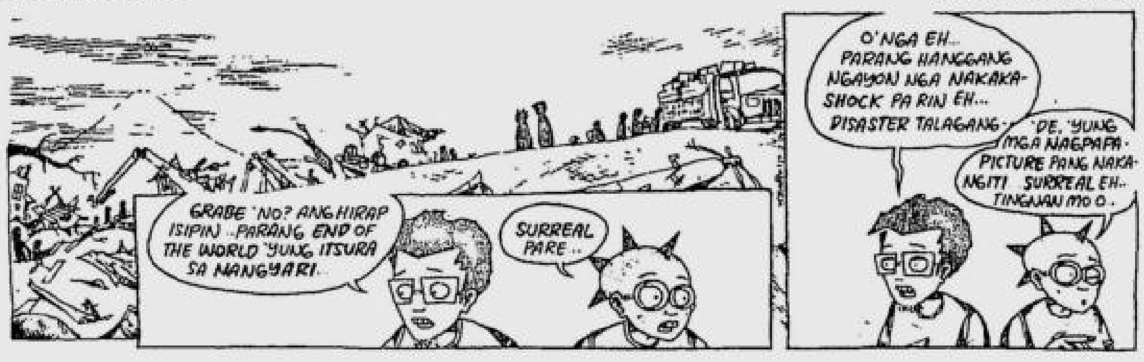

IS IT IMPOLITE TO ASK FOR GIFTS FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVEN'T GIVEN ME ANY YET?
OF COURSE IT IS! YOU DON'T ASK FOR PRESENTS. YOU WAIT FOR PEOPLE TO GIVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY.
BUT A LOT OF PEOPLE ASK FOR PRESENTS I SEE IT ALL THE TIME!
WELL, THEY'RE SHMUCKS

DIVINE COMEDY BY STEVEN PABALINAS

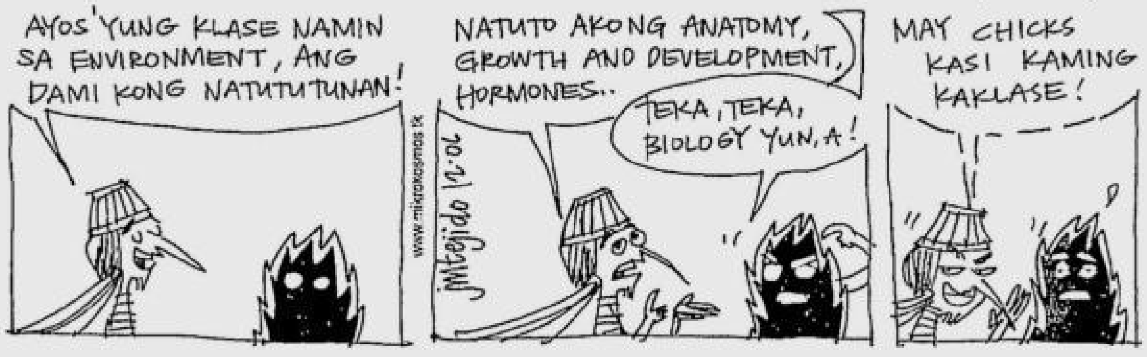


HE KNOWS IF YOU'VE BEEN BAD OR GOOD

KIKO MACHINE BY MANIX ABRERA


GRABE 'NO? ANG HIRAP ISIPIN ..PARANG END OF THE WORLD 'YUNG ITSURA SA NANGYARI.
SURREAL PARE...
O'NGA EH... PARANG HANGGANG NGAYON NGA NAKAKA-SHOCK PA RIN EH... DISASTER TALAGANG-
'DE, 'YUNG MGA NAGPAPA-PICTURE PANG NAKA-NGITI SURREAL EH.. TINGNAN MO O..

MIKROKOSMOS BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


AYOS 'YUNG KLASE NAMIN SA ENVIRONMENT, ANG DAMI KONG NATUTUTUNAN!
NATUTO AKONG ANATOMY, GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT, HORMONES..
TEKA, TEKA, BIOLOGY YUN, A!
MAY CHICKS KASI KAMING KAKLASE!
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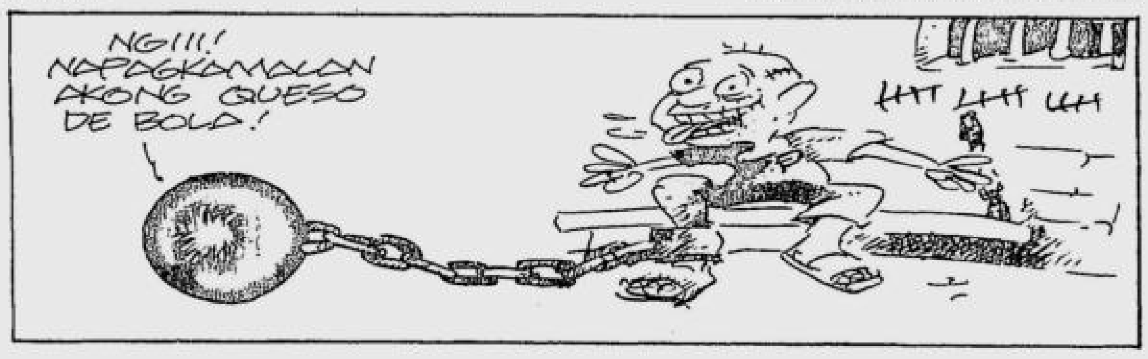
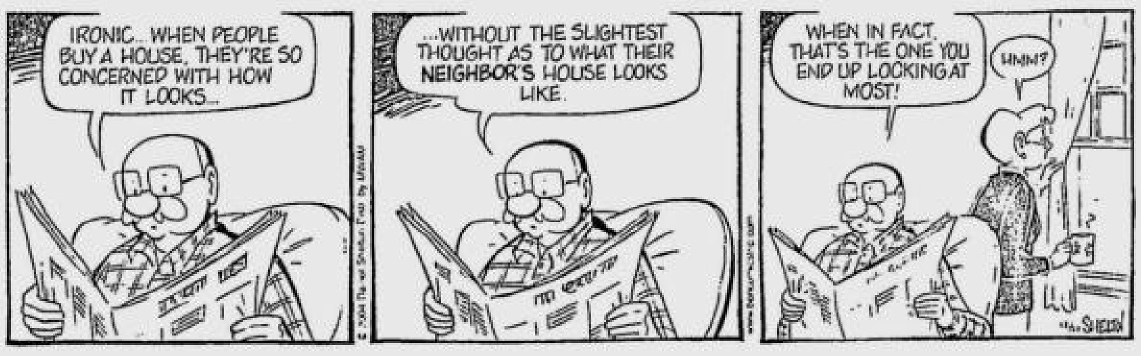
www.mikrokosmos.tk

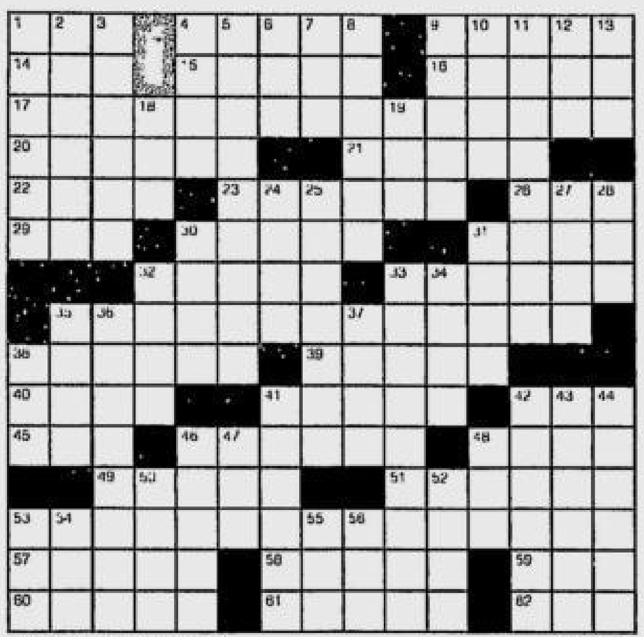
TULDOK BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


NGIII! NAPAGKAMALAN AKONG QUESO DE BOLA!
HATT LHH UH

BEN BY DANIEL SHELTON


IRONIC...WHEN PEOPLE BUY A HOUSE, THEY'RE SO CONCERNED WITH HOW IT LOOKS...
...WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST THOUGHT AS TO WHAT THEIR NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE LOOKS LIKE.
WHEN IN FACT, THAT'S THE ONE YOU END UP LOOKING AT MOST!
HMM?
SHELTON

DAILY CROSSWORD



By Philip J. Anderson
Portland, OR

12/27/06

ACROSS
1 Paid player
4 Rugby formation
9 Sufficient
14 Debtor's letters
15 "Common Sense" writer
16 Reveals
17 Dissension at the NCAA?
20 Move upward
21 Microsoft man
22 Golf props
23 Maps in maps
26 Sort
29 Harris and McMahon
30 Cuts and splices
31 Emmy winner Falco
32 Quench
33 Basketball formation
35 Dissension at the WBA?
38 With 10D, Rosalind Russell movie
39 Merchandise
40 Crimson and scarlet
41 Gardner's Mason
42 School org.
45 Worldwide worker's grp.
46 Twisted into ringlets
48 Incursion
49 Floppy
51 Mortar's partner
53 Dissension at the USGA?
57 Old pieces of a pound
58 Colossus
59 Food scrap
60 Consumed
61 Kind of daisy
62 Compass dir.

DOWN
1 Buccaneer
2 Awakened
3 Pound parts
4 Twirl
5 Office seeker
6 Fix a roulette wheel?
7 Actress Merkel
8 Comes together
9 Is adjacent to
10 See 38A
11 Acted as chair
12 Writer Deighton
13 D.C. hours
18 Old video game initials
19 Gangster's gun
24 Formula One driver Lauda
25 Long-time Yankee skipper
27 Describes the length of a fish?
28 Author Kesey
30 Sch. designation
31 Goes astray
32 Some NCOs
33 Fencing
34 Buffalo Bill
35 Kindling
36 Habitually lazy
37 Writer Vidal
38 "Exodus" role
41 Magic word
42 Barbeque sites, often
43 Masonic doorkeepers
44 "__ Fideles"
46 Singer Leonard
47 Mil. morale grp.
48 Q-U connectors
50 In the past
52 "__ kleine Nachtmusik"
53 Cockney aspiration
54 Soup legume
55 Ducats
56 Israel follower

Tuesday's Puzzle Solved

S	T	L	O		J	A	M	B	S		R	A	Z	E
H	O	O	P		A	N	O	U	K		O	B	E	Y
I	T	W	A	S	M	Y	P	L	E	A	S	U	R	E
M	O	S	Q	U	E		E	L	E	V	A	T	O	R
			U	R	S	A		E	T	A	L			
A	B	L	E		D	A	R	T			I	M	P	S
Z	O	E		W	E	R	E		S	E	N	O	R	A
I	W	A	S	H	A	P	P	Y	T	O	D	O	I	T
D	E	F	C	O	N		E	V	E	N		L	O	B
E	N	Y	A			P	L	E	A		W	A	R	Y
			R	I	T	A		S	M	E	E			
S	E	A	F	R	O	N	T		I	N	T	A	K	E
I	T	W	A	S	N	T	A	P	R	O	B	L	E	M
N	A	R	C		E	R	A	T	O		A	D	A	M
S	T	Y	E		D	Y	L	A	N		R	O	N	A

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12/27/06

HOROSCOPE

YOU BORN TODAY: You're passionate about life! You have high ideals and strive to devote yourself to a noble cause. You believe in performing a service for others or for society. You're naturally good-natured and possess a wonderful sense of humor. You are generous with your time and your possessions. A major choice will present itself in the coming year. Choose wisely.

Birthdate of: Emilie de Ravin, actress; Wilson Cruz, actor; Gerard Depardieu, actor

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): In the next few weeks, discussions with parents and bosses will become more important. Fortunately, you're not afraid to stand up and present your side of things.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): This is an excellent time to sign up for a course or to pursue studies in history, philosophy or religion. You want to talk about lofty subjects with someone. Travel plans also look promising.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): This is an excellent time to tidy up loose ends regarding insurance matters, inheritances, estates and anything to do with shared possessions. You have a window of about four weeks in which to do this.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): Today Mercury moves directly opposite your sign. This will encourage discussion with your closest friends and partners. (But can you keep your shirt on if you want to get something off your chest?)

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): In the next few weeks, conversations with coworkers will be more productive than usual. People are willing to listen to what you have to say.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): You feel playful, prankish and flirtatious now! Time spent with children will be rewarding. Conversations with romantic partners become increasingly meaningful. (Woo woo.)

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): Family discussions could promote home improvements. Fix whatever is broken at home. Someone will probably help you do this.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): You have a strong need to enlighten others about ideas that are important to you. Short trips and increased time spent with relatives and siblings keep you busy in the next few weeks.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Trust your moneymaking ideas now. Talk to others about ways to improve your income. You might also see opportunities to earn money on the side.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): Today Mercury moves into your sign. For the next three weeks, you'll be busier and more active talking to people. You might be excited about something.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): Your ability to do research in the next month is wonderfully enhanced. Go after anything you're curious about. You have the mind of a sleuth now!

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Discussions with friends or members of groups will be more productive than usual in the next month. Don't hesitate to put forth your suggestions. Others will listen to you now.

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku by Dave Green

		2						
					6	5		
	9	4		5		6		1
	1		6		8			
		7				3		
			2		9		7	
4		3		1		9	8	
		6	8					
						4		

Difficulty Level ★★★ 12/27

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HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

7	9	6	4	8	3	2	1	5
4	5	3	1	2	9	7	6	8
2	8	1	6	7	5	9	4	3
6	3	2	7	9	8	1	5	4
1	7	9	3	5	4	6	8	2
8	4	5	2	6	1	3	9	7
5	1	8	9	3	7	4	2	6
3	2	4	8	1	6	5	7	9
9	6	7	5	4	2	8	3	1

Difficulty Level ★★

The year that was in fashion

From page D1

popular than stripes, as the former lasted until the last quarter of 2006. Small polka dots were found everywhere, from hair accessories to dresses to belts.

Skull prints also became popular, although not as popular as stripes or polka dots. And no, they weren't gothic. Cutesy and small, skull prints appealed even to girly girls.

Speaking of hair accessories, hairbands made another comeback: '60s-style wide hairbands, scarves and big ribbons were worn not just by grade-school girls, but fashion-savvy women as well. However, after a while, it became disconcerting to see matrons with big ribbons on top of their hair.

Korean fashion also hit the market as several local retailers upped the funky factor in their clothes in an effort to make their clothes look more Korean, and therefore, hip. Jumpers, leggings, ruffled tops, dresses, and loud prints and colors defined the look, which looked great on Koreans but not always on Filipinos.

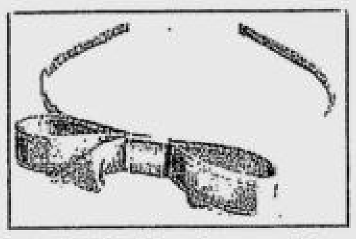
If 2005 leaned toward Victorian and Edwardian sensibilities with high necklines and ruffles, 2006 was frothier and more luxurious. Forget staid old Queen Victoria: this time, Marie Antoinette, with all her excesses, ruffles and drooping ostrich feathers, ruled the court. Linen dresses, corsets and pastel colors in all their feminine glory were snapped up by diehard fashion fanatics. Costume jewelry and ribbons served as accessories.

On the beauty front, more people abandoned their stick-straight hair and decided to go for loose waves and perms. Lash extensions and false lashes became popular, thanks to Japanese makeup brand Shu Uemura, which brought in its Tokyo Lash Bar that showcased lashes made of feathers and studded with rhinestones.

E-mail the author at biancaconsunji@yahoo.com

'80s FASHION comeback: leggings

FILIPINOS couldn't get enough of Korean fashion.
PHOTO COURTESY OF MY LITTLE DRESS



CUTESY hairbands weren't just for kids.

color option

NAUTICAL fashion came in mid-2006.

Talkin' tech

From VOIP to YouTube, dazzling inventions and innovations on the tech front kept us all agog this year

By Gabriel H. Mercado
2bU! Contributor

T'WAS THE YEAR OF THE APPLE, 3.2 megapixel cell phones with gigabytes of memory, celebrity bloggers, and channeling our inner Spielberg for the whole world to see.

Itube, YouTube, WeAllTube. Time Magazine's Person of the Year is the User who generates content. It's a tribute to YouTube's legions of loyal users who view up an incredible 100 million times and upload 65,000 videos of their own each day. With everything from videos of kids goofing off to snippets of TV shows and thousands of amateur productions, YouTube stole hours of our time and captured the imagination of anyone who's ever wondered what it would be like to produce, direct or act in a video for a mass audience. Andy Warhol once said we'd all have our 15 minutes of fame. YouTube gives you 10 minutes (unless you have a paid account), and 100mb.

Pro blogging. Professional bloggers are people living the dream. While dishing out their thoughts and opinions on their online journals, they've also become so famous that they command advertising rates that compete with news websites. Blessed with wit, tons of personality and an often strong point of view, the Pro Blogger is the new celebrity, with earnings that allow them not only to quit their jobs, but to live quite comfortably from their blogs.

Intel's Core Duo. Unlike in years past when the arrival of a new Intel processor was a much-heralded affair, these days it's an almost run-of-the-mill occasion. Still, this latest version from Intel gained hype. Once again, the chip is faster and offers more goodies than recent models. But, as usual, expect a replacement on its way approximately middle of next year.

Intel-based Macs and Boot Camp. In a move that had Mac faithful frothing in the mouth, Apple allowed Mac users to run (gasp) Microsoft Windows on their machine once they adopted Intel processors for all their computers. Apple CEO Steve Jobs was hoping to lure Windows users and allow Mac users to run applications made for Windows, such as many popular games. While controversial at the start, the issue faded into the background—a possible indication that while the ability to run Windows could be made available, it didn't necessarily mean people would do it.

Game consoles and gaming. When the Sony Playstation and, more recently, the Nintendo Wii were sold on their first day, TV news flashed pictures of hundreds of customers lined up for hours outside stores. This showed what gamers have known for a long time, that gaming has matured into mainstream entertainment. Far from being the realm of teenage boys, it is now a family-oriented activity, anticipated just as much by mom and dad as well as their kids. Which is great, considering that, at their prices, the Playstation and the Wii are way beyond any kid's allowance.

8-10 megapixel standards. For digicams, the megapixel race seems to have hit a plateau at 8-10 megapixels for both the Pro SLR and point-and-shoot categories. The focus now has shifted toward the types of accessories one can use, the quality and adaptability of the lens, the type of memory card, and other traditional factors like build quality, ease of use, cost and local after-market support.

3.2 megapixels and gigabytes of space. While I've tried a 5 megapixel camphone, 3.2 megapixel seems to be just right for this form, with anything bigger becoming more difficult to use for lack of a proper lens. This year has seen some of the easiest-to-use models ever. Tiny hard disks also power new models with more space than you could ever hope to fill.

Mainstream VOIP. These days, we take talking on GTalk, Y! Messenger and Skype for granted. But the year before, who would have thought we'd even have access to it? VOIP means the end of the myopic landline and inflated IDD/NDD rates—a sign that technology could disrupt the ways of the repressive old guard in hugely beneficial ways.

CANON
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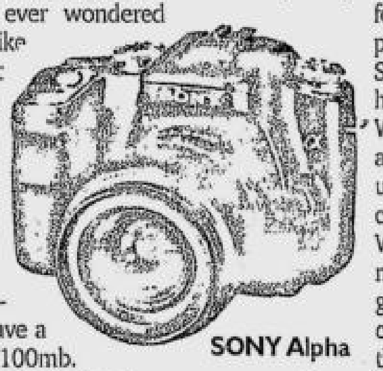

SONY Alpha

NINTENDO Wii

The Great Equalizer in the Digital Divide

For the Philippines, Technology is the Key for Global Competitiveness

> ***"...With the advent of independent ATM deployment and transaction processing, as well as the progressive expansion of wireless broadband connectivity, there are more revenue opportunities open to rural enterprises than ever before."***

"In the era of globalization, the use of technology is imperative to progress... and this principle applies as much to businesses as it does to countries," Said PLDT SVP and Head of Corporate Business Group, Mr. Eric R. Alberto, as he spoke at the Rural Banking Association of the Philippines (RBAP) 2006 Special Membership Meeting and National Management Conference. The two-day symposium, named Back to the Future: Perspective on the Next 50 Years, featured speakers like Mr. Nestor Espenilla Jr., Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Deputy Governor, Ms. Gilda E. Pico, President and CEO of Landbank of the Philippines and Senator Edgardo J. Angara.

Mr. Eric Alberto, who worked in corporate banking for over 20 years, assured his contemporaries that the wireless ICT phenomenon is more than just a business trend. His presentation, titled Impact of Telecommunications on Countryside Development, pointed to enabling rural banks with wireless technology as a substantial nation builder for the Philippines. For this reason, the PLDT Group is working doubly hard on broadbanding the countryside to equip rural banks with technology and infrastructure that will further improve their operations and subsequently, their bottom line.

"We encourage everyone to explore these wireless technologies with serious consideration since wireless coverage in the country has become pervasive and is available practically everywhere," said Mr. Alberto, "Wireless communication technology is now considered the best medium to reach markets at the edges of our archipelago in a most cost-effective and efficient manner."

The PLDT-SMART network has over 6,000 cellular sites around the country, serving about 99.3% of the population. This unmatched wireless coverage has helped the company introduce groundbreaking technology that was virtually unheard of just a few years ago. Now, it's easy to establish wireless ATMs in far-flung regions of the Philippines, thanks to PLDT SWUP or Shops.WorkUnPlugged. SMART Money combines mobile services with MasterCard's network, allowing people to shop, pay bills and transfer money from their bank account to their card without having to worry about carrying cash. The hottest wireless Internet solutions around, PLDT WeRoam and SMART Bro (Enterprise Edition) now make e-commerce and online banking a feasible means to industry growth. Only 9 banks offered e banking services in the year 2000. As of 2005, this number has dramatically increased to 44.

"In the next 3 to years, fixed and wireless Internet access and other data services will become commonplace," said Mr. Alberto, "Rather than a luxury, it will be a basic service accessible to more people from all walks of life, all over the country... And with the advent of independent ATM deployment and transaction processing, as well as the progressive expansion of wireless broadband connectivity, there are more revenue opportunities open to rural enterprises than ever before."

"The technologies we have explored have shaped the present and will continue to shape the future landscape of business operations in a globalized world," Mr. Alberto said, "This is the not-so-distant future. Don't be left behind."

"We at PLDT have always sought to pioneer the latest in technologies and strive to make it available to every Filipino and Philippine business, to enable them to be globally competitive," he continued, "That is what our over P150 billion in investments on research and development and network expansion over the last seven years were all about. That is what P54 billion more in investments in the next three years aims to ensure. And through these investments, we hope to have contributed in our own way to community development and our country's journey toward sustainable growth and progress."

Nico Alcoseba, PLDT Corporate Solutions Development Manager, discusses how PLDT SWUP technology allows banks to establish wireless ATMs in remote areas during a product demo.

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December 25
Monday
Music Hall 2PM

FUN CLUB CHRISTMAS PARTY

The Filipino Classics

BASIL VALDEZ

December 29 Friday
Main Lobby 6PM

Eragon

December 30 Saturday
10AM onwards

Catch a glimpse of the biggest movie to start the new year, Eragon: the first of the "Inheritance" Trilogy series about a young man named Eragon, who is destined to be a Dragon Rider. With special performances by the country's sought-after bands ***Cueshe*** and ***Craeon***.

WORLD PYRO OLYMPICS

January 5-7 & 12-13, 2007
Esplanade, 7PM

Witness 9 countries battle in the most explosive event this year: the World Pyro Olympics.

December 31 Sun 8PM onwards

SM MALL OF ASIA FIREWORKS COUNTDOWN

Countdown to the New Year with our hourly fireworks display.

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"Symphony of Lights" every night at
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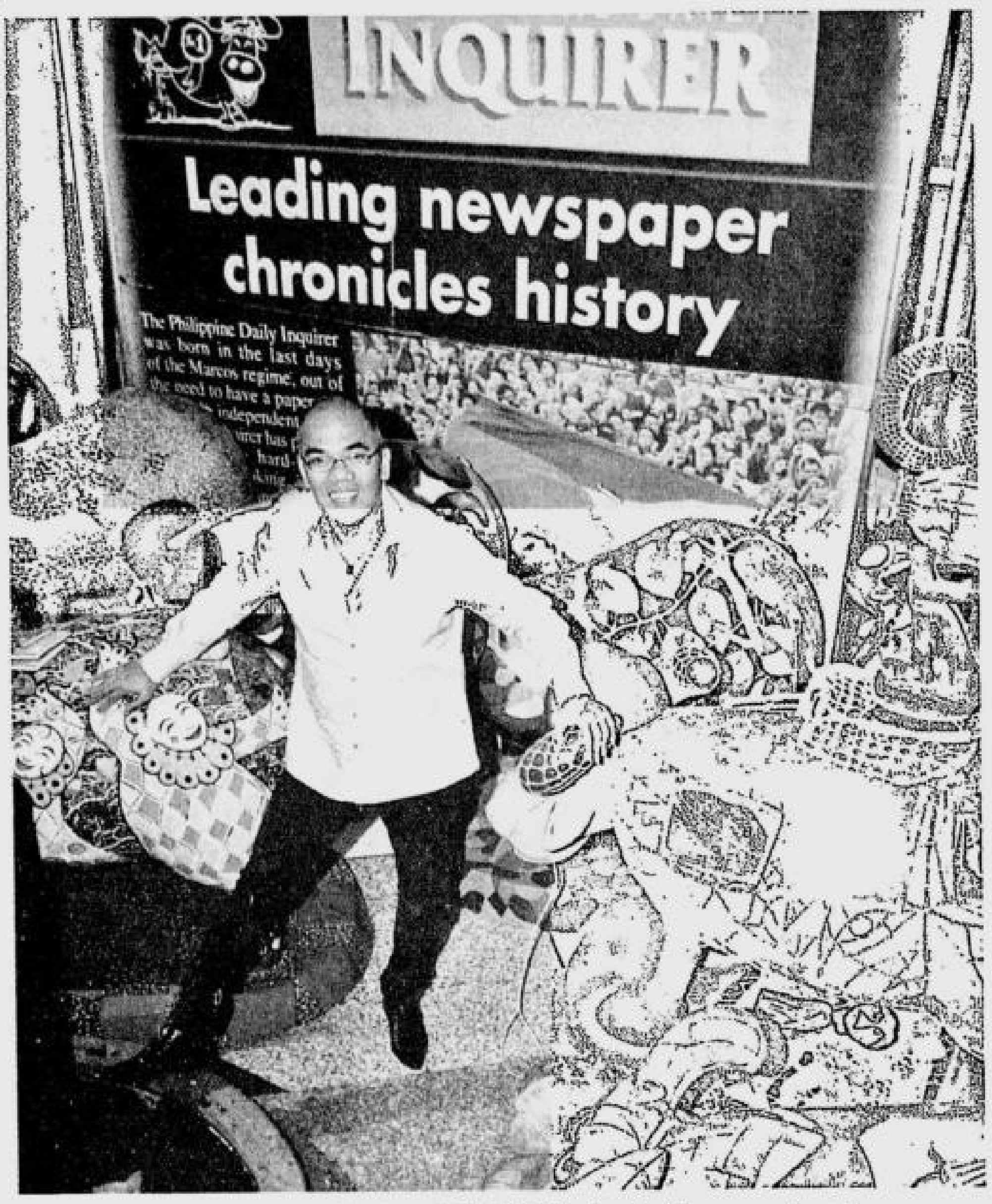
ENTERTAINMENT

Editor **Emmie G. Velarde**

sms feedback: inquirer ent name/age/city/message to 2207 (Globe) and 283 (Smart) **or email us at** pr_entertainment@inquirer.com.ph

FUN SNAPS FROM 2006


INQUIRER
Leading newspaper chronicles history
The Philippine Daily Inquirer was born in the last days of the Marcos regime, out of the need to have a paper

THE COUNTRY'S irrepressible Boy of Talk TV visited us in February, when the Christmas 2005 Guyitos were still corralled under the spiral staircase in the PDI lobby. During a lengthy chitchat, Boy Abunda told us: "I'm not afraid to go home [to Boronggan, Samar, where he was born and raised]. When all of this is done, I will host a talk show with the fish and the carabaos and have a good laugh." The Guyitos (with Boy in this photo by Ryan Lim) have beat him to it. PDI donated the carabao mascots shortly after to different schools, some of them in the provinces.

And to think this would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Master Danongan K
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This is a listing o
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music or tradition

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publishing company
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state of the art techn
Grace Nono, Bob Av
Butocan and Sin
electronically. Victor O
unique three-generation
This Fil-Hawaiian fam
traditional and contemporary Hawaiian music where they reside in Santa Cruz County in Northern California.

The band members consist of Grandpa Allen, 72,

Kulintang Ensemble last month) at ODC Theater located in heart of the Mission District, San Francisco.

It was a thrilling, if not exhilarating
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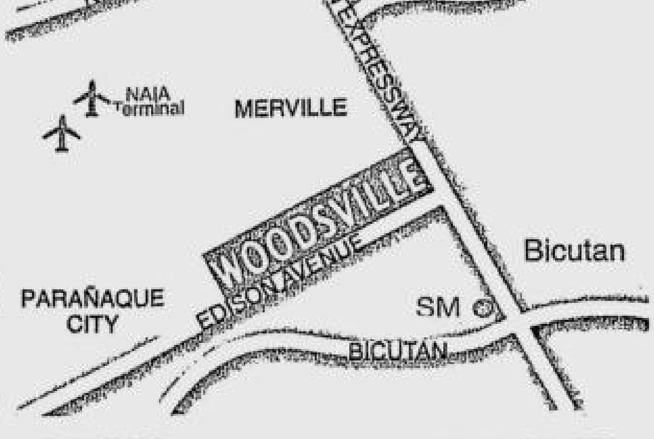
Units are affordably available in 2 or 3-bedroom models - all offering attractive payment schemes that allow easy monthly payments.

To know more about **Woodsville Viverde Mansions,** please visit our Model Units at the ground floor of Robinsons Galleria Mall near Ortigas entrance or call **636-0888** or **0922-8380888.**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CUESHÉ

Christmas in Cebu for Cueshé

By Bayani San Diego Jr.

THE ROCK BAND CUESHÉ HAS BEEN ON the road since kicking off a nationwide tour last September.

The boys have been everywhere from Baguio to Cotabato but, this holiday season, they hope to visit their home province, Cebu.

"We've been so busy with the tour that we haven't seen our families for the past three months," vocalist Jay Justiniani admits. "Christmas is the best time to catch up with them."

Drummer and band leader Mike Manaloto says his only wish is for "happiness and more blessings for my family." Pressed for specifics, he adds that his biggest dream is to acquire a house and lot.

New car

Guitarist and vocalist Ruben Caballero is eyeing a new car for his wife and three kids.

On top of the Christmas list of lead guitarist Jovan Mabini are his mom and dad. "I want to give them whatever they want."

Bassist Fritz Labrado hopes to find a new bass guitar—specifically a Music Man—under the tree. After all, he explains, a new guitar will be useful in their numerous gigs.

Going easy

Keyboardist Jhunjie Dosdos can't wait to see his two sons. "All I want is for my family to remain together," he says.

According to Sony-BMG, the boys have decided to take it easy this month and that their next big gig is set in January 2007.

In the works are shows in Guam and the United States, as well as a major concert in Manila.

The tour has made the boys realize just how loyal their fans are.

Even though they have yet to go on a full promotional campaign for their latest Sony-BMG album, "Back to Me," Manaloto notes, "People in the audience know the new songs by heart and they sing along."

Sony-BMG told INQUIRER Entertainment that Cueshé's debut ("Half-Empty, Half-Full") has hit the double-platinum mark and that the follow-up is fast approaching gold status.

"We treat our fans as if they're our friends," Justiniani insists. "We have followers from all age groups—from *lolas* (grandmothers) to their *apos* (grandkids)."

The fans stand by them, Manaloto points out, even if the band has taken a different route, music-wise, in their second outing.

"It's more laid-back and relaxed," admits Manaloto. Justiniani explains, "It's the perfect music when you're feeling lonely and sentimental, and you're just resting and reminiscing in your bedroom."

Upbeat

"That's why we're seriously considering a more upbeat sound for our third album," says Manaloto.

No, fans, they're not going disco...

"It's more like Sugar Ray with a twist," Justiniani quips. "Or Smash Mouth."

CHEER FACTOR

MEXICO CITY—IT may lack the glamor of Miss Universe, but Mexico City's Miss Meche beauty pageant for prostitutes made up for it in heart and humor.

On Friday, 10 sex workers sashayed on a makeshift stage in Merced, a poor neighborhood famous for prostitution, showing off homemade dresses in a pageant organized by the prostitute support group Street Brigades.

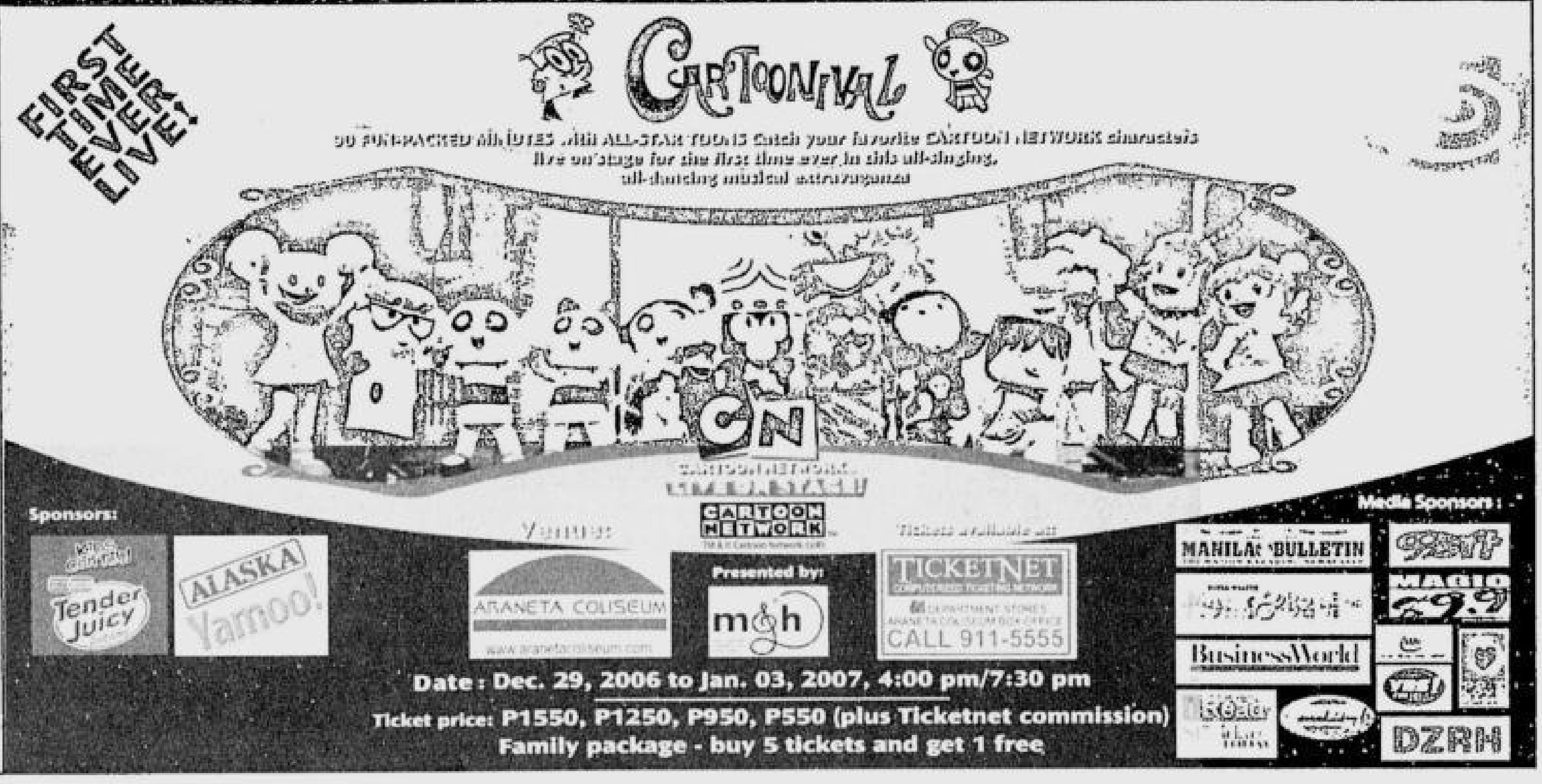
Prizes ranged from US$50 to US$100, but participants said the biggest reward was a lift in their self-esteem. *AP*

NOT 1, NOT 2, BUT 14 OF YOUR FAVOURITE CARTOON NETWORK CHARACTERS ARE COMING TO TOWN.
Watch Dee Dee and Dexter from Dexter's Laboratory, Bubbles, Blossom, Buttercup and Mojo Jojo from The Powerpuff Girls, Blooreguard, Mac, Wilt Eduardo and Coco from Fosters Home for Imaginary Friends, Ami and Yumi from Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi all performing live!
SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER: UPPER BOX B TICKETS NOW FOR ONLY ~~P550~~ P100 EACH. VALID WHILE SUPPLY LASTS!

SHOW SCHEDULE

Dec. 29	4:00 pm	7:30 pm
Dec. 30	4:00 pm	7:30 pm
Dec. 31	No Show	
Jan. 1	4:00 pm	7:30 pm
Jan. 2	1:00 pm	4:00 pm
Jan. 3	7:30 pm	

Due to typhoon, there was a shipment delay. The Dec. 28 show is cancelled but we added a 1pm show on Jan. 2, 2007 Ticket buyers are requested to rebook their tickets to the other shows as per the schedule above. Those who will be inconvenienced by such a change, are requested to claim for refund at the Ticketnet office, Araneta Coliseum. Thank you.



Date: Dec. 29, 2006 to Jan. 03, 2007, 4:00 pm/7:30 pm
Ticket price: P1550, P1250, P950, P550 (plus Ticketnet commission)
Family package - buy 5 tickets and get 1 free

glorietta GREENBELT ALABANG TOWN AYALA CENTER CEBU MARKET! MARKET! Ayala Malls

AT THE CINEMAS

Reserve your tickets by texting SURESEATS GB3 or SURESEATS G4 to 2333 (Globe) or 211 (Smart) or log on to www.sureseats.com for web reservations.
Movie schedules may change without prior notice. For verification please call 729 7777

G1 GLORIETTA 1	1 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3	3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH	4 LIGALIG			
G4 GLORIETTA 4	1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO	2 LIGALIG	3 THX TATLONG BARAHA GUARANTEED SEATS	4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA	5 MANO PO 5	6 SUPER NOYPI	7 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8
GB1 GREENBELT 1	1 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH	2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3					
GB3 GREENBELT 3	1 THX SUPER NOYPI GUARANTEED SEATS	2 THX MANO PO 5 GUARANTEED SEATS	3 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA GUARANTEED SEATS	4 TATLONG BARAHA GUARANTEED SEATS	5 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO GUARANTEED SEATS		
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M2 MARKET! MARKET!	1 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	2 ENTENG KABISOTE 3	3 SUPER NOYPI	4 MANO PO 5	5 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH		

At the Activity Center

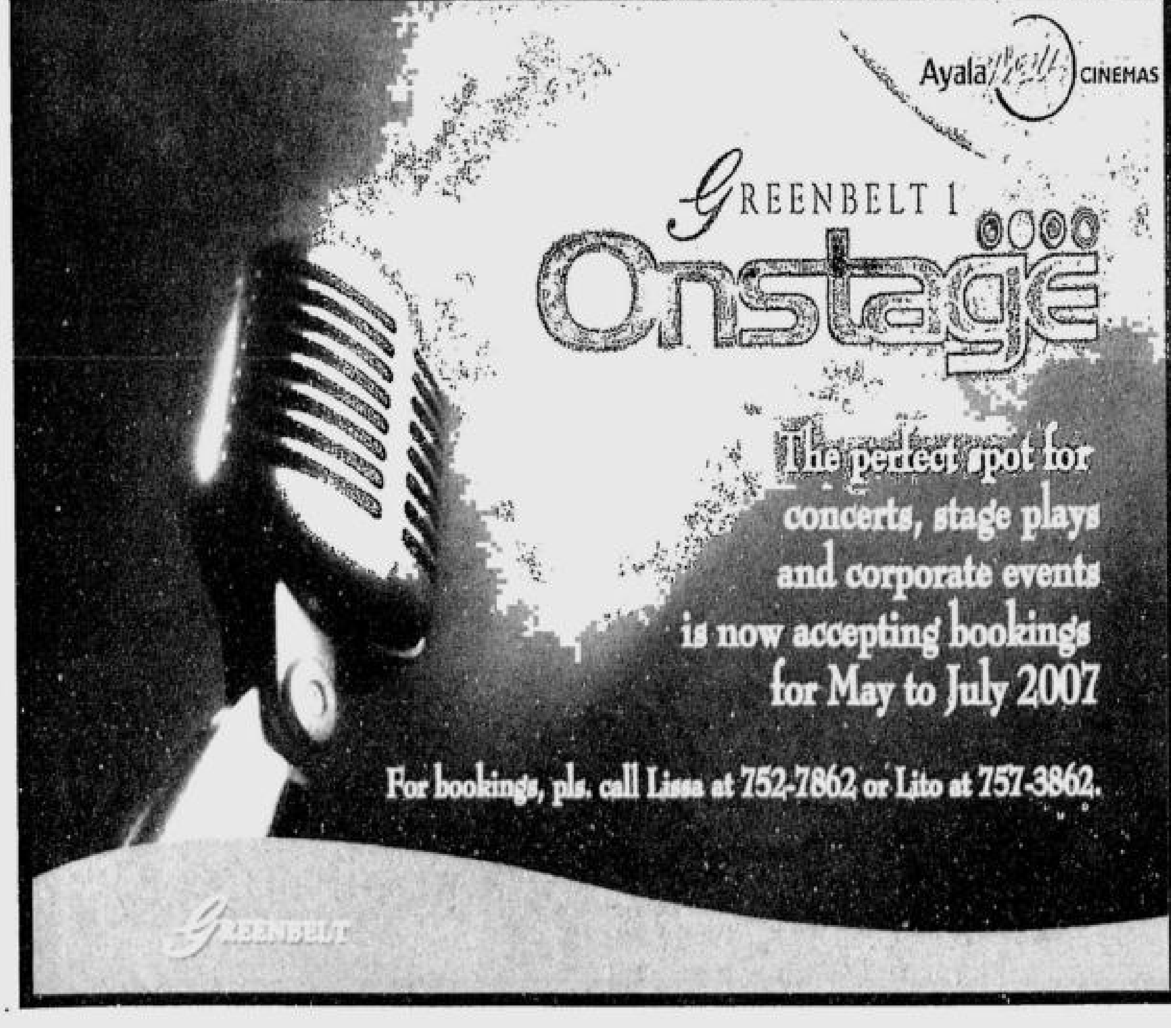
Customer Service text hotline: 0917 6095900
Customer Service Numbers: Glorietta - 752 7272; from 10am to 9pm
Greenbelt - 757 4853, from 11am to 9pm
Alabang Town Center - 842 2782; from 10am to 8pm
Ayala Center Cebu - (032) 231 5342 loc 324
Market! Market! - 886 7519

GLORIETTA	ALABANG TOWN CENTER
Globe Event December 22 to 24, 2006	Anson Exhibit December 11 to 22, 2006
AYALA CENTER CEBU	MARKET! MARKET!
Stepstones Learning Center Christmas Presentation December 21, 2006	Radyoke Challenge: Grand Finals December 30, 2006

GREENBELT
Holiday Harmonies with the Philippine Madrigal Singers
December 23, 2006

GREENBELT 1 Onstage
ONSTAGE - The perfect spot for concerts, stage plays & corporate events is now accepting bookings for May to July 2007
For bookings, pls. call Lissa at 752-7862 or Lito at 757-3862

Ayala MUSEUM
19th - 20th Century Philippine Art from Ayala Museum Collection
On-going until January 2007
For inquiries, please call 757-7117 to 21 or visit www.ayalamuseum.org



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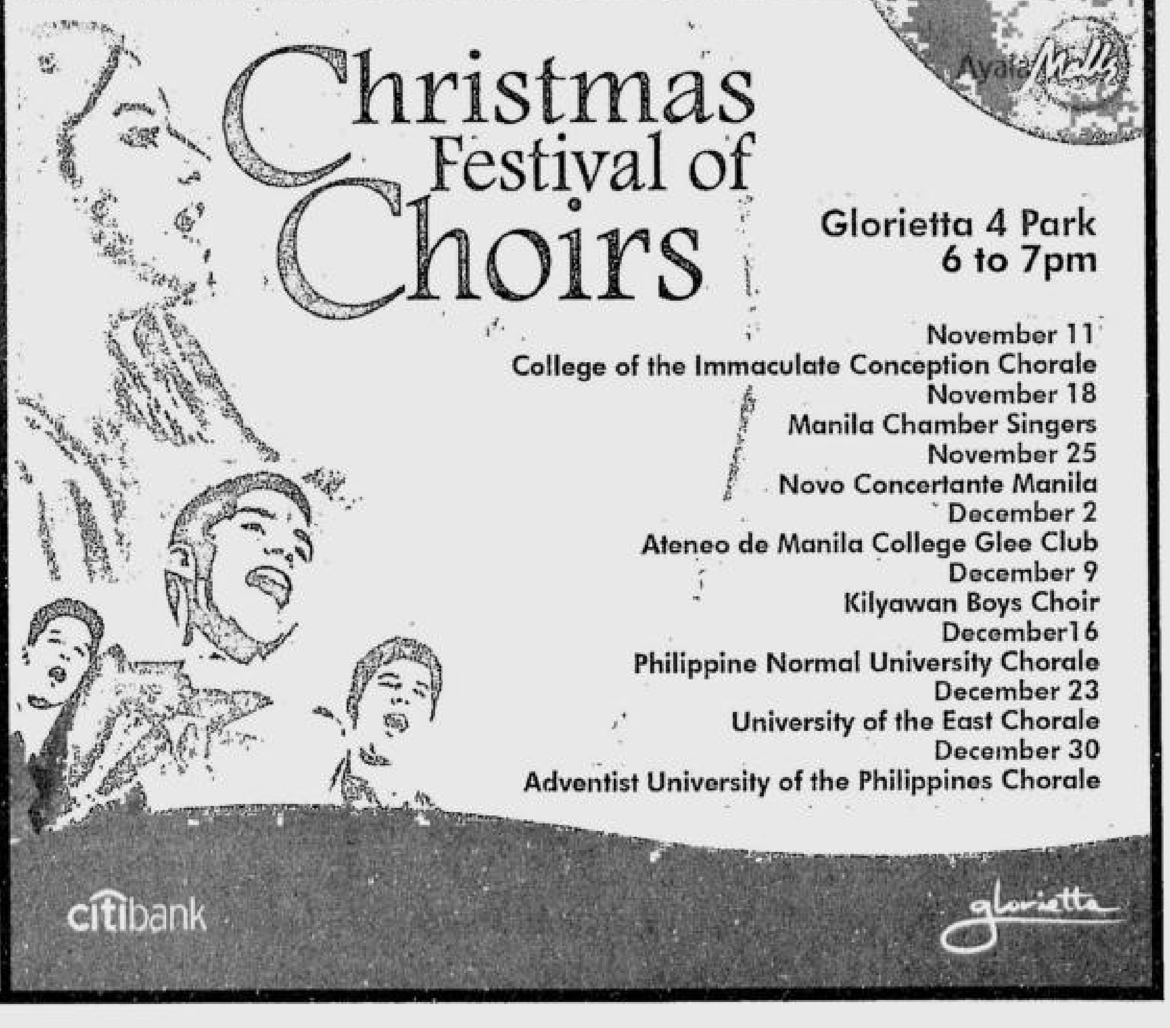


Christmas Festival of Choirs

Glorietta 4 Park
6 to 7pm

November 11
College of the Immaculate Conception Chorale
November 18
Manila Chamber Singers
November 25
Novo Concertante Manila
December 2
Ateneo de Manila College Glee Club
December 9
Kilyawan Boys Choir
December16
Philippine Normal University Chorale
December 23
University of the East Chorale
December 30
Adventist University of the Philippines Chorale

ROUNDUP

'Innocent voices'

More than 300,000 children presently serve in armies in over 40 countries.

Director Luis Mandoki underscores the severity of this global problem in "Innocent Voices," the poignant tale of Chava (Carlos Padilla), an 11-year-old El Salvadoran boy who suddenly becomes the "man of the house" after his father abandons the family in the middle of a civil war.

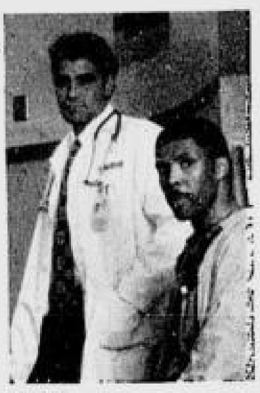
The movie will be shown soon exclusively at Ayala Malls Cinemas (Glorietta 4 and Greenbelt 3).

Survival stories

The acclaimed series "I Shouldn't Be Alive" enters its second season on Discovery Channel, showcasing the world's most incredible stories of survival.

Premiering every Monday at 10 p.m., the show presents the following episodes:

"Frozen at 20,000 Feet," Feb. 12; "Trapped Under the Ice," Feb. 19; "Into the Heart of Darkness," Feb. 26; "Blood in the Water," March 5; "Dive Into Danger," March 12; and "Nightmare Canyon," March 19.



"ER"

Medical series

Hallmark Channel will feature the team of medical personnel assigned in the emergency room of a fictional Chicago county hospital in Michael Crichton's "ER."

The pilot telecast is a two-hour movie showing on Jan. 1. The rest of season one episodes will be shown Monday to Friday, 8 p.m.

Another medical series, this time centering on the workings of the brain, will air every Monday starting Jan. 15, 9 pm. "3 Lbs." refers to the human brain's weight.

The series stars Stanley Tucci as Dr. Doug Hanson, a top-notch neurosurgeon whose long-held practice on brain operation will be challenged by the unorthodox approach of his apprentice, Dr. Jonathan Singer (Mark Feuerstein).

'Sinenovela'

GMA-7 will soon serialize five well-loved movies—"Saan Darating ang Umaga," "Dapat Ka Bang Mahalin," "Sinasamba Kita," "Kung Mahawi Man ang Ulap," and "Gaano Kadalas ang Minsan."

Under the umbrella title "sinenovela," the movies to be released by Viva Films will be turned by the network into TV dramas through its pool of writers.

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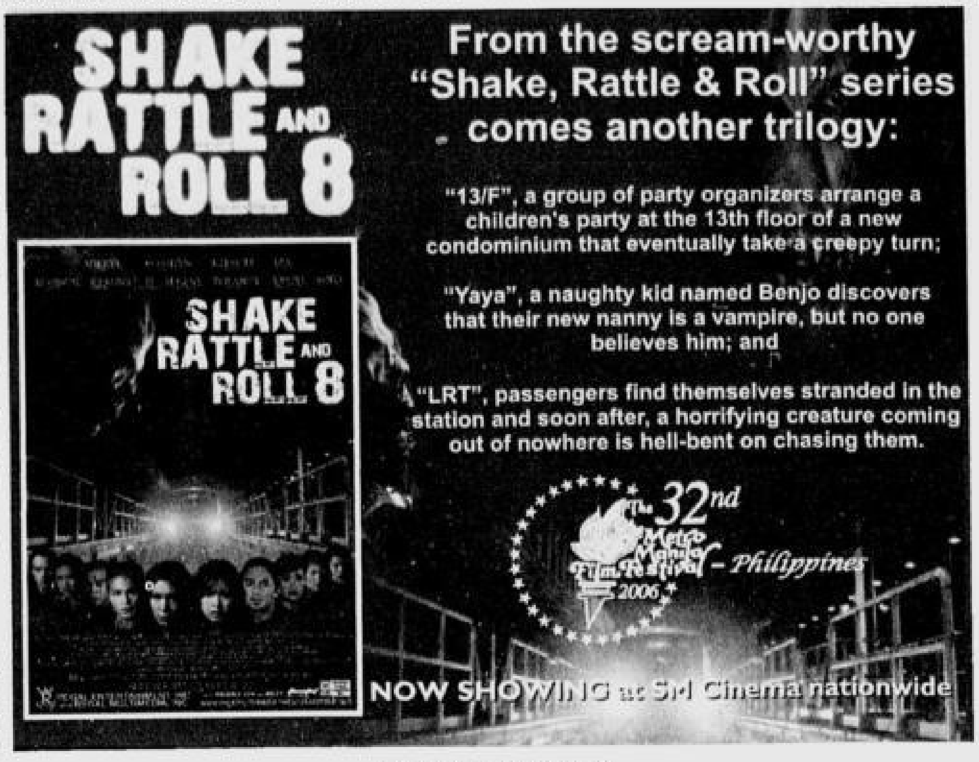

From the scream-worthy "Shake, Rattle & Roll" series comes another trilogy:

"13/F", a group of party organizers arrange a children's party at the 13th floor of a new condominium that eventually take a creepy turn;

"Yaya", a naughty kid named Benjo discovers that their new nanny is a vampire, but no one believes him; and

"LRT", passengers find themselves stranded in the station and soon after, a horrifying creature coming out of nowhere is hell-bent on chasing them.

The 32nd Metro Manila Film Festival – Philippines 2006

NOW SHOWING at SM Cinema nationwide

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IMAX

T-REX IN 3D
11:00AM 12:15PM 4:00PM 7:45PM
Admission Price P200

SANTA VS SNOWMAN IN 3D
1:30PM 2:45PM 5:15PM 6:30PM 9:00PM 10:15
Admission Price P200

1 LIGALIG
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 MANO PO 5
6 ENTENG KABISOTE 3

PREMIERE CINEMA
SUPER NOYPI

CENTERSTAGE
SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

THE PODIUM

CINEMA 1
ENTENG KABISOTE 3

CINEMA 2
KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
633-8976

SM NORTH EDSA 929-5452

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SM MEGACINEMA 633-1901

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SM CITY FAIRVIEW 935-0749

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SM CITY STA. MESA 716-1416

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SM CITY SAN LAZARO 786-2488

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SM CITY SOUTHMALL 806-6888

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SM CITY BICUTAN 776-3055

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SM CITY MANILA 523-9240

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SM CITY DASMARINAS (046)4323201-04

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SM VALENZUELA 293-3917

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4 TATLONG BARAHA

SM CITY SUCAT 829-4975

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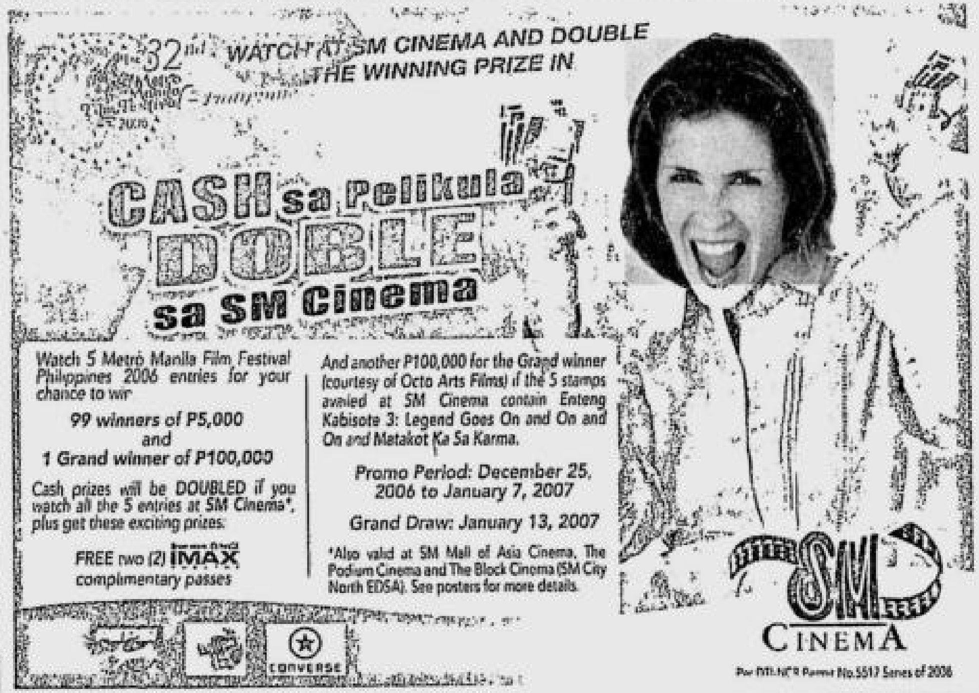
moviettime PROMO

Watch and Win at SM Cinema



32nd Metro Manila Film Festival Philippines 2006
CONVERSE

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Watch 5 Metro Manila Film Festival Philippines 2006 entries for your chance to win

99 winners of P5,000
and
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Cash prizes will be DOUBLED if you watch all the 5 entries at SM Cinema*, plus get these exciting prizes:

FREE two (2) IMAX complimentary passes

And another P100,000 for the Grand winner (courtesy of Octo Arts Films) if the 5 stamps availed at SM Cinema contain Enteng Kabisote 3: Legend Goes On and On and On and Matakot Ka Sa Karma.

Promo Period: December 25, 2006 to January 7, 2007

Grand Draw: January 13, 2007

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8 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8

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2 MANO PO 5
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ERMITA 636-7809 to 12

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2 LIGALIG
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
4 TATLONG BARAHA
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
6 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
7 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8

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3 ZSA ZSA ZATURRNAH
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7 ENTENG KABISOTE 3
8 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8

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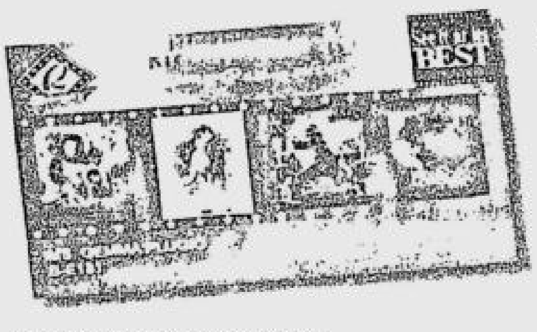

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6 KASALI, KASAL, KASALO

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4 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL 8
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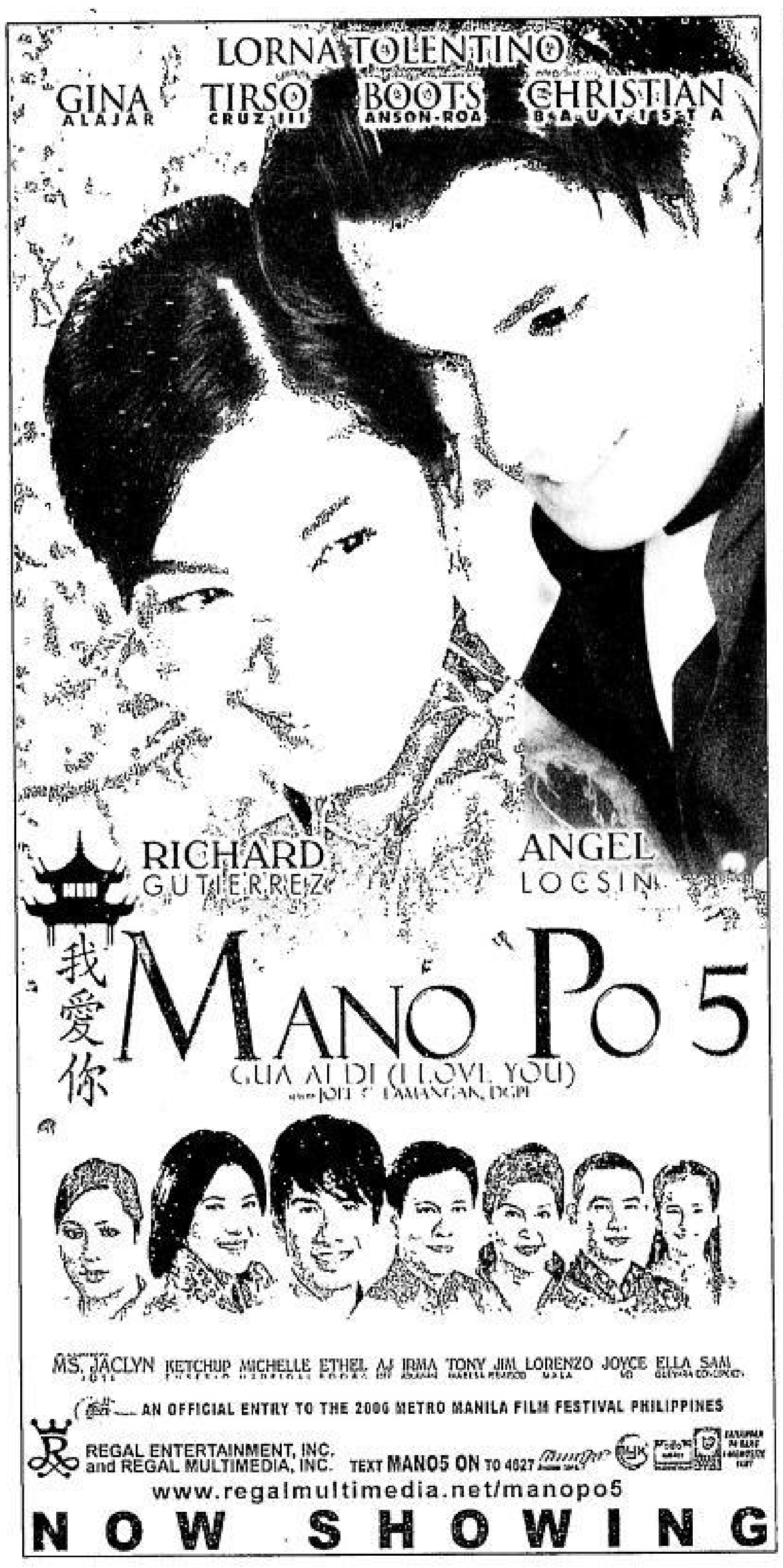
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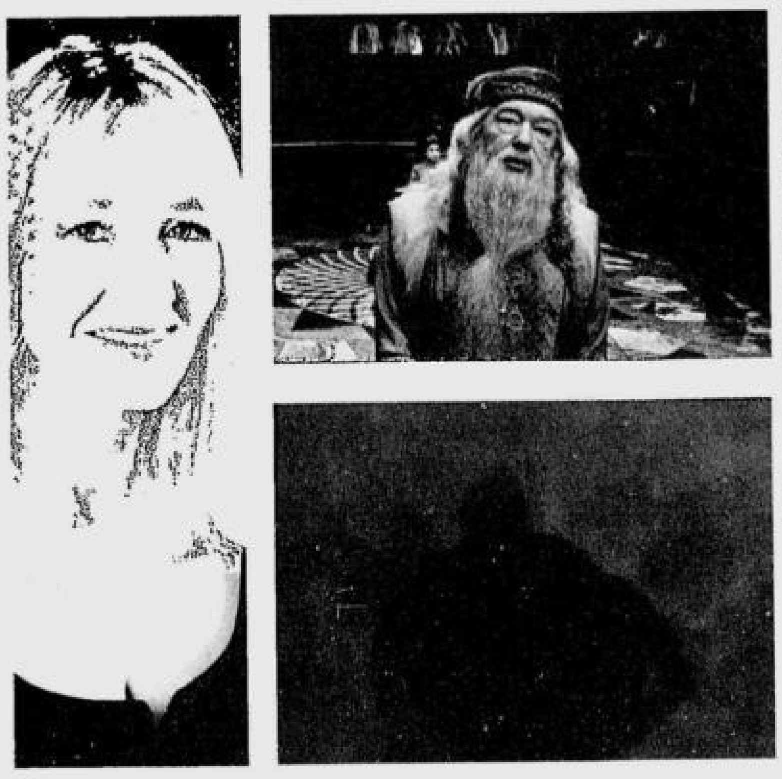
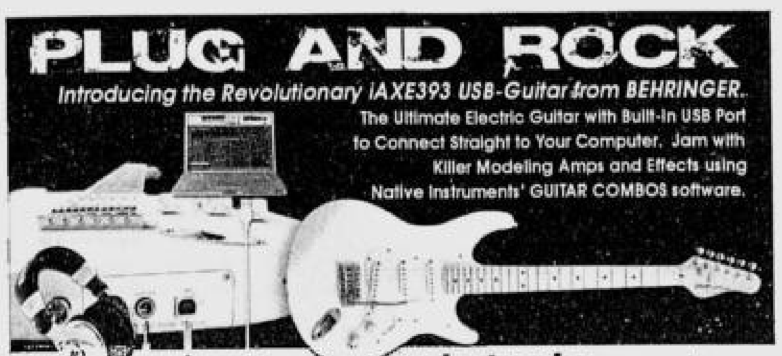


A FEW NIGHTS ago, J.K. Rowling, left, had "an epic dream" in which she was, simultaneously, Harry and the narrator.

WOULD Harry face a grisly demise? How will it all end? The author is not giving more than a simple promise to finish the new book.



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Pottermania:
The last book

LONDON—BRITISH AUTHOR J.K. Rowling revealed on Thursday that the long-awaited seventh and final book in her wizard saga will be called "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows," sparking the next phase of Pottermania.

Fans of the series that has already sold an estimated 300 million copies worldwide were kept guessing with the publication date not set—although that did not stop one US bookseller from starting to take reservations.

The intriguing and ominous title had Potter aficionados puzzling over what might happen to the bespectacled hero.

"Will a favorite character die? Could Harry himself face a grisly demise? How will it all end?" asked Sam Harrison, children's buyer at the British bookchain Waterstone's.

"But surely the question all Potter fans will want answering as soon as possible is—when can they get their hands on a copy?"

Rowling, whose creation has turned her into one of the world's richest and most successful authors, revealed on her website this week, "I'm now writing scenes that have been planned, in some cases, for a dozen years or even more. I am alternately elated and overwrought. I both want, and don't want, to finish this book (don't worry, I will)."

She said in the diary entry on her official website (www.jkrowling.com) that Potter had now inveigled his way into her dreams.

"For years now, people have asked me whether I ever dream that I am 'in' Harry's world," Rowling wrote. "The answer was 'no' until a few nights ago when I had an epic dream in which I was, simultaneously, Harry and the narrator."

But she gave no clues as to what will happen at the end of the upcoming book, amid speculation that some of the characters, possibly Harry himself, will die.

Rowling's last novel, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince," was her most successful book in the US, she said, selling 6.9 million copies in the first 24 hours.

But despite uncertainty over the publication date, book retailer Borders said it had started taking reservations for the seventh book on Dec. 8 and on Thursday e-mailed a link to its customers to sign up for e-mail notification when the book can be reserved online.

"Anticipation for this book has been building since the sixth book was released in 2005," said Borders senior vice president Linda Jones in a statement. "We are sensing real excitement from our customers."

Reuters

Sa Sun, 'di nakaka-tense magtawagan.
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AMAZING ANNE
Anne Curtis just moved into her new home—a four-bedroom, Victorian-inspired house in a posh subdivision south of Manila. It is the sweet fruit of her work on the *teleseryes* "Hiram," "Kampanerang Kuba" and "Maging Sino Ka Man" and, she says, well worth every sleepless night.

Whoa, that girl Jennifer Hudson

REVIEW

NEW YORK—THE TITLE OF THE film is "Dreamgirls" but it could have been called "A Star Is Born."

Former "American Idol" contestant Jennifer Hudson walks away with this big, splashy dazzler of a picture, based on the 1981 Broadway musical, even before performing her plaintive, show-stopping number, "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going."

Writer-director Bill Condon has crafted an enormously entertaining, technically triumphant film. In following the rise of a Supremes-style Detroit trio—played by Hudson, Beyoncé Knowles and Anika Noni Rose—the music, choreography, costumes, lighting and make-up are all superb. The editing is consistently fluid, the energy high.

"Dreamgirls" is more successful than other revered stage productions that have come to the screen recently—"The Phantom of the Opera," "Rent" and "The History Boys"—which maintained the core of their content and seemed too structured, too clunky.

Yet the ending is so rushed it'll make your head spin. And the whole thing can be hard to take seriously—especially "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going" which, in the past 25 years, has become a favorite drag queen anthem.

When Hudson does end up going, though, the movie goes with her, and it perks right back up again when she returns. With her huge voice and fierce presence, she proves herself a worthy successor to Jennifer Holliday, who originated the role of Effie White, lead singer of the Dreamettes.

Sufficiently sleazy

Jamie Foxx is sufficiently sleazy as the group's two-timing manager, car salesman Curtis Taylor, with Eddie Murphy revisiting his "Saturday Night Live" James Brown impression as R&B sex machine Jimmy Early.

Curtis takes over the trio after seeing them perform at an amateur night and promptly begins romancing the feisty Effie, who drops her guard and lets herself fall in love with him. The notoriously philandering Jimmy, meanwhile, sets his sights on the small, meek one of the three, Rose's Lorell, as they all begin touring and recording together, with the trio serving as Jimmy's backup singers.

But it doesn't take long for Curtis to move the Dreamettes out from behind Jimmy and onto center stage, renaming them the Dreams and making Knowles' Deena—who's prettier and lighter-skinned than Effie—the lead singer.

Sans Cowell

Deena replaces Effie in Curtis' bed, as well, sparking a rift that sends Effie spiraling while the rest of the group becomes stratospherically successful with fill-in singer Michelle (Sharon Leal). And as Deena becomes the most visible member of the trio it's hard to tell whether Curtis is in love with the woman or merely dependent on her as a product.

While Knowles' voice is as strong as Hudson's in her own poppy way, she still needs to beef up in the acting department.

Murphy, however, digs deep for the first time in a long time. The wild partying takes a toll on Jimmy off stage, making it increasingly difficult to perform on stage.

But this is Hudson's movie all the way. And by the way, who was it who won "American Idol" the season she was on there? Never mind—she turned out more than fine, with or without Simon Cowell's help. *Christy Lemire, AP*

JENNIFER HUDSON

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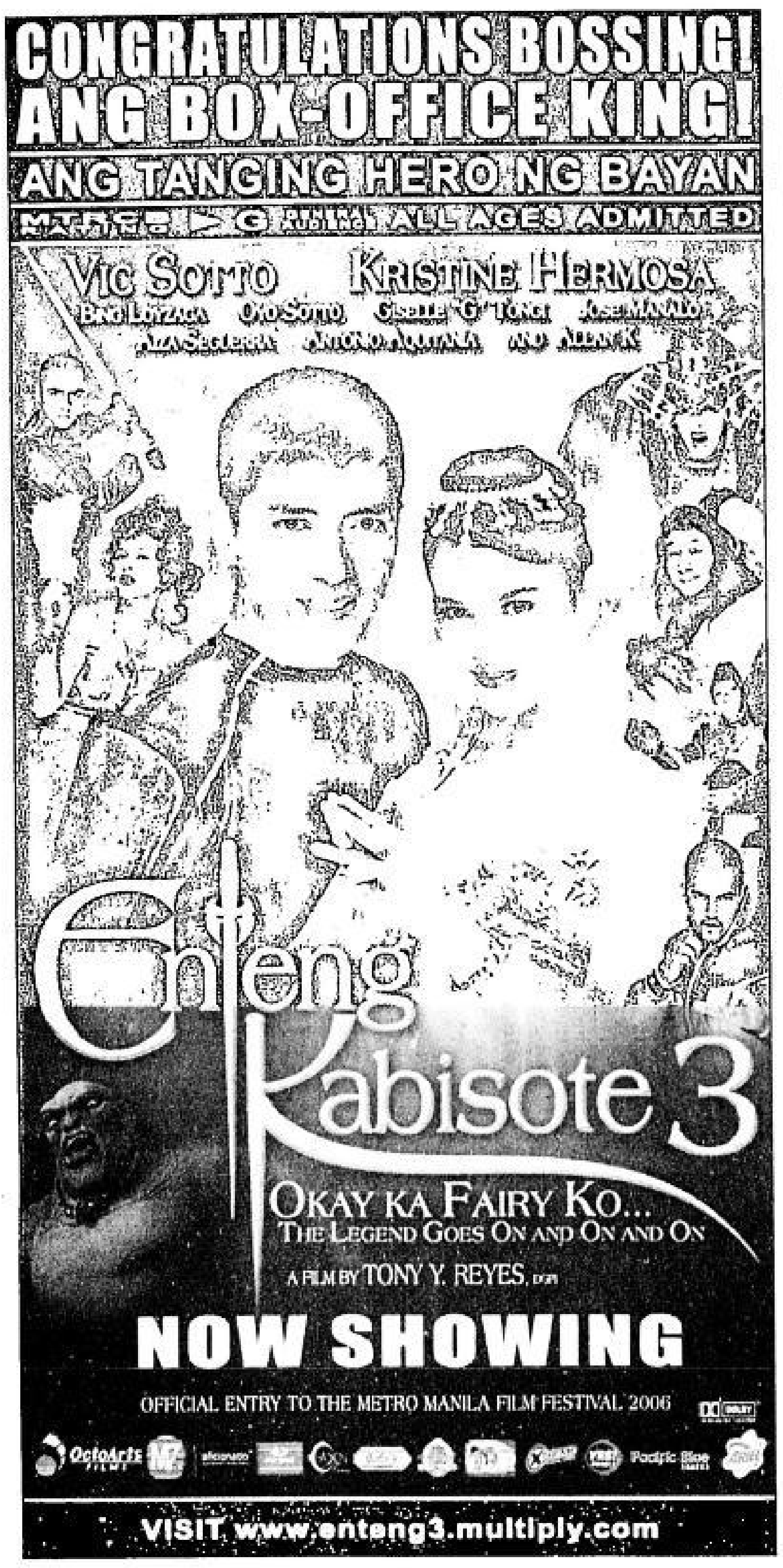

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2	SUPER NOYPI	12:50, 3:15, 5:50, 8:25, 11:00	G
3	ENTENG KABISOTE 3	12:50, 3:15, 5:50, 8:25, 11:00	G
4	SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL 8	1:35, 4:30, 7:25, 10:20	PG-13

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MANO PO 5	MATAKOT KA SA KARMA PG13 1:30,3:40,5:50, 8:00,10:10	TATLO BARAHA PG13

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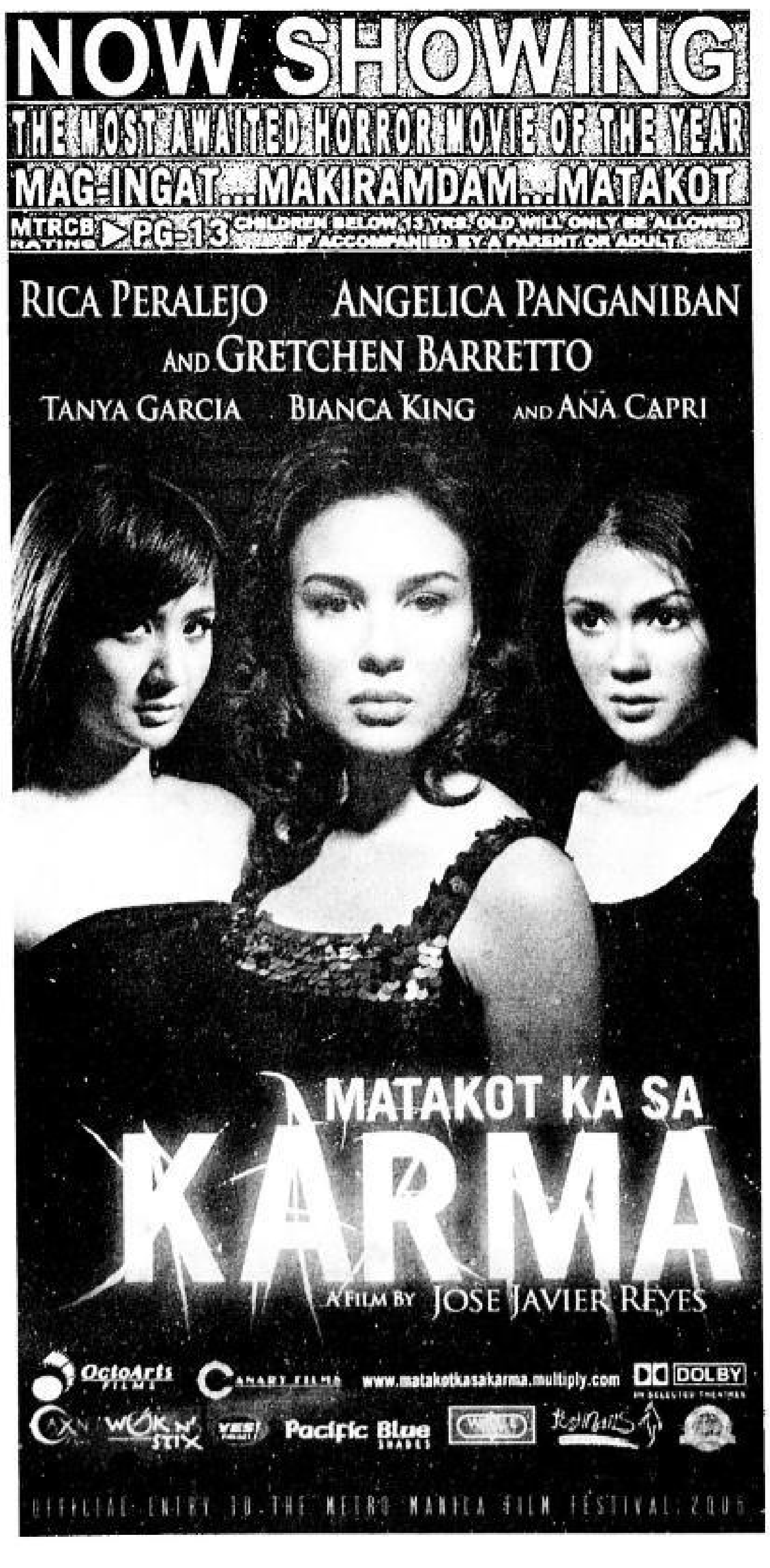

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Quantity over quality in ABS-CBN holiday special

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

WE VIEWED ABS-CBN'S CHRISTmas special, "Tuloy-Tuloy and Pasko" from start to finish last Sunday, Dec. 17, hoping to get a Yuletide glow from its musical treats. We did enjoy some of its tuneful production numbers, but others bombed because some of the participants simply didn't know how to sing.

Among the top offenders were the sour-singing "comedians" who figured in a "game" roundelay medley in which one "singer's" last word became the next performer's first statement.

At first, the non-singing comics tried to get by with the "humor" resulting from their awesome lack of musical ability. But, there were so many of them that the "joke" soon became unbearable.

> The show could also have had more of a Christmas feeling to it

Worse, some "talents" seemed to think that they were really quite fantastic (albeit heretofore undiscovered) singers, so they "sang" for an extended time, prompting countless cats (but hopefully no humans) to commit suicide.

Thank goodness, younger talents like Vhong Navarro and Rayver Cruz acquitted themselves well in a long and demanding medley. There's hope for local show biz yet.

Alas, another (unexpected) bomb was the number featuring some of the country's best musical-theater talents. The problem wasn't that they didn't sing well, but that they were much too competitive for comfort. They tried to top each other with increasingly higher notes, as the poor viewer cringed from the aural and visual assault.

The special's "kiddie medley" was fun and further bolstered our optimism about the future of Philippine entertainment. But the child performer's outstanding voices were compromised by their *porma*, *pa*-cute and sometimes too adult performing styles.

Child talents and their mentors should keep reminding themselves that juvenile performers are *children*, so they should sound and look like the fresh and spontaneous youths they are.

They have the rest of their lives to grow up—and old. So, they should enjoy their few years as kids, and focus on their sense of fun and wonder, inspiring listeners and viewers with the freshness and honesty of youth.

The special's final portion was anticlimactic because it was given a "Wowowee" twist that required network executives to "dance" the noontime show's signature "Boom-tarat-tarat" routine—with embarrassing results.

We know that the "dare" was meant to show that the executives could get off their lofty perches and be "just folks," but the effect was less warm than off-putting.

Summing up, we appreciate ABS-CBN's impressive investment in terms of massive stellar talent, time and budget to make its Christmas special a spectacular Yuletide treat.

But it erred by stressing quantity over quality, with production numbers that featured literally scores of talents, sometimes with each stellar performer having only one or two lines to sing.

The show could also have had more of a Christmas feeling to it, plus a clearer focus on Filipino carols, as suggested by the special's title.

'Transit'

Sponge Cola's newly released "Transit" album has been certified gold. The album has spawned the hit single "Baliw," the theme of the TV-fantasy series, "The Adventures of Pedro Penduko."

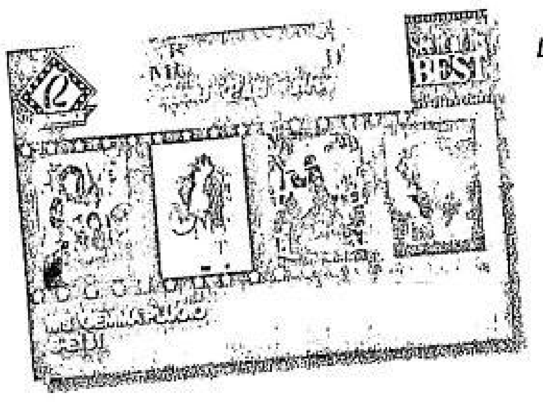
'A Life Among Whales'

The National Geographic Channel premieres "A Life Among Whales" at 10 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 30.

The documentary by biologist Roger Payne focuses on a group of mammals in dire need of protection against hunting and pollution.

'The Girl Who Lives in the Dark'

On Discovery Channel, "The Girl Who Lives in the Dark" premieres at 9 p.m. on Jan. 8. The medical documentary introduces viewers to Wan Lao Yang, a 9-year-old girl from rural China, who suffers from a rare genetic disorder that makes her skin unable to repair itself after exposure to UV light.



Watch and Win an ALL-YEAR-ROUND Robinsons Movieworld Cinema Card!!!

Robinsons Movieworld will give away one (1) cinema card to the 100 cash prize winners of the "Cash sa Pelikula" raffle promo provided that they have watched at least 3 movies at any Robinsons Movieworld Branch.

PROMO PERIOD:
December 25, 2006 to January 05, 2007

NCAP MBC MMDA

See Posters for more details

Per DTI-NCR Permit #5517, Series of 2006

ARANETA CENTER
Gateway Alimall FarmersPlaza

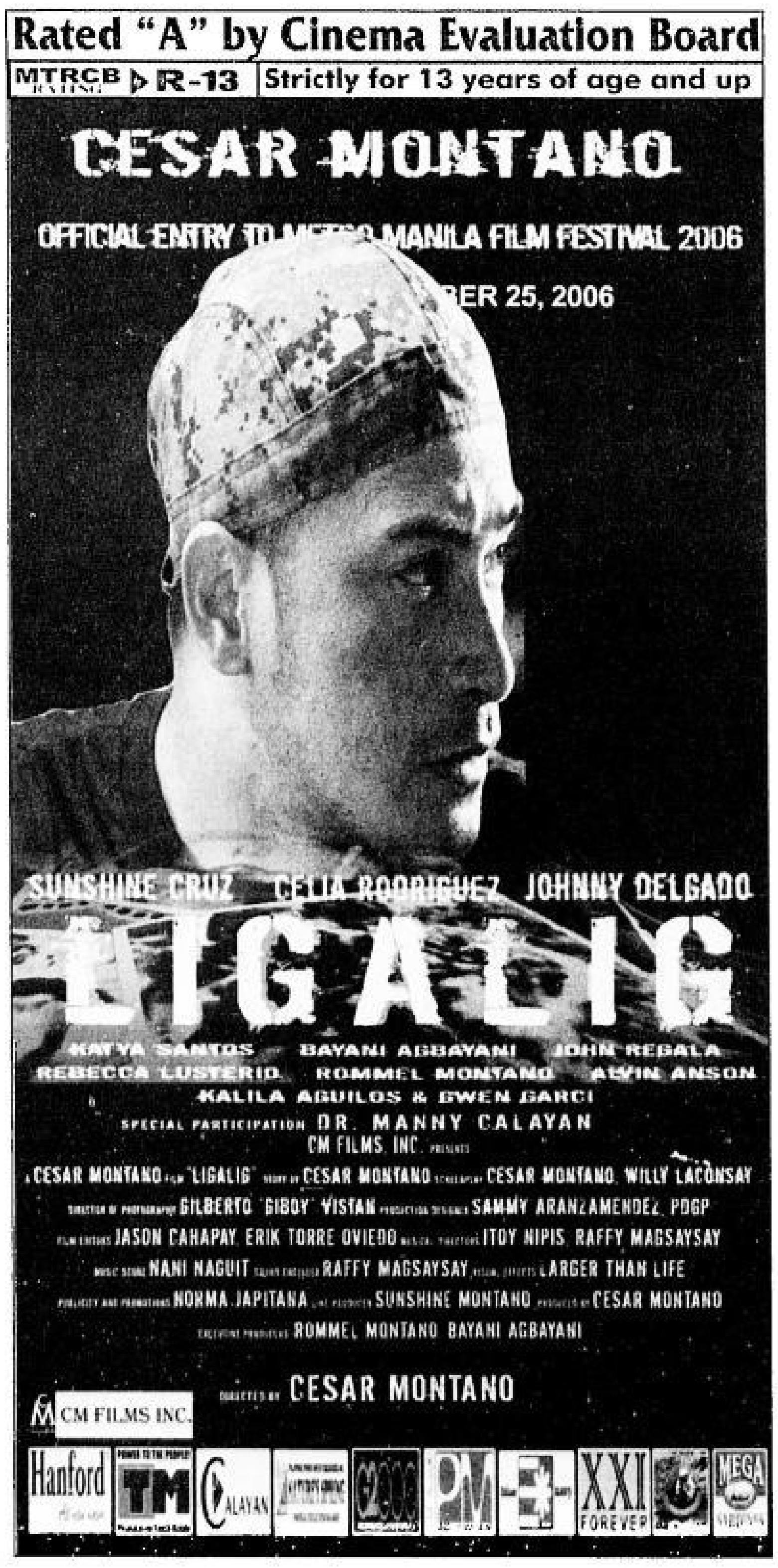
THE ONLY CINEPLEX IN THE COUNTRY
Gateway CINEPLEX*10
DOLBY DIGITAL-EX

KASAL, KASALI, KASALO 1:10 / 3:20 / 5:30 / 7:40 / 9:50
SUPER NOYPI 12:20 / 2:40 / 5:00 / 7:20 / 9:40
ENTENG KABISOTE 3 12:10 / 2:30 / 4:50 / 7:10 / 9:30
LIGALIG 1:30 / 3:30 / 5:30 / 7:30 / 9:30
ZSA ZSA ZATURNAH 1:00 / 3:10 / 5:20 / 7:30 / 9:40
SHAKE RATTLE & ROLL 10:40 / [illegible] / 6:55 / 9:40
TATLONG BARAHA 12:50 / 3:00 / 5:10 / 7:20 / 9:30
MANO PO 5
MATAKOT KA SA KARMA [illegible]
RESERVED

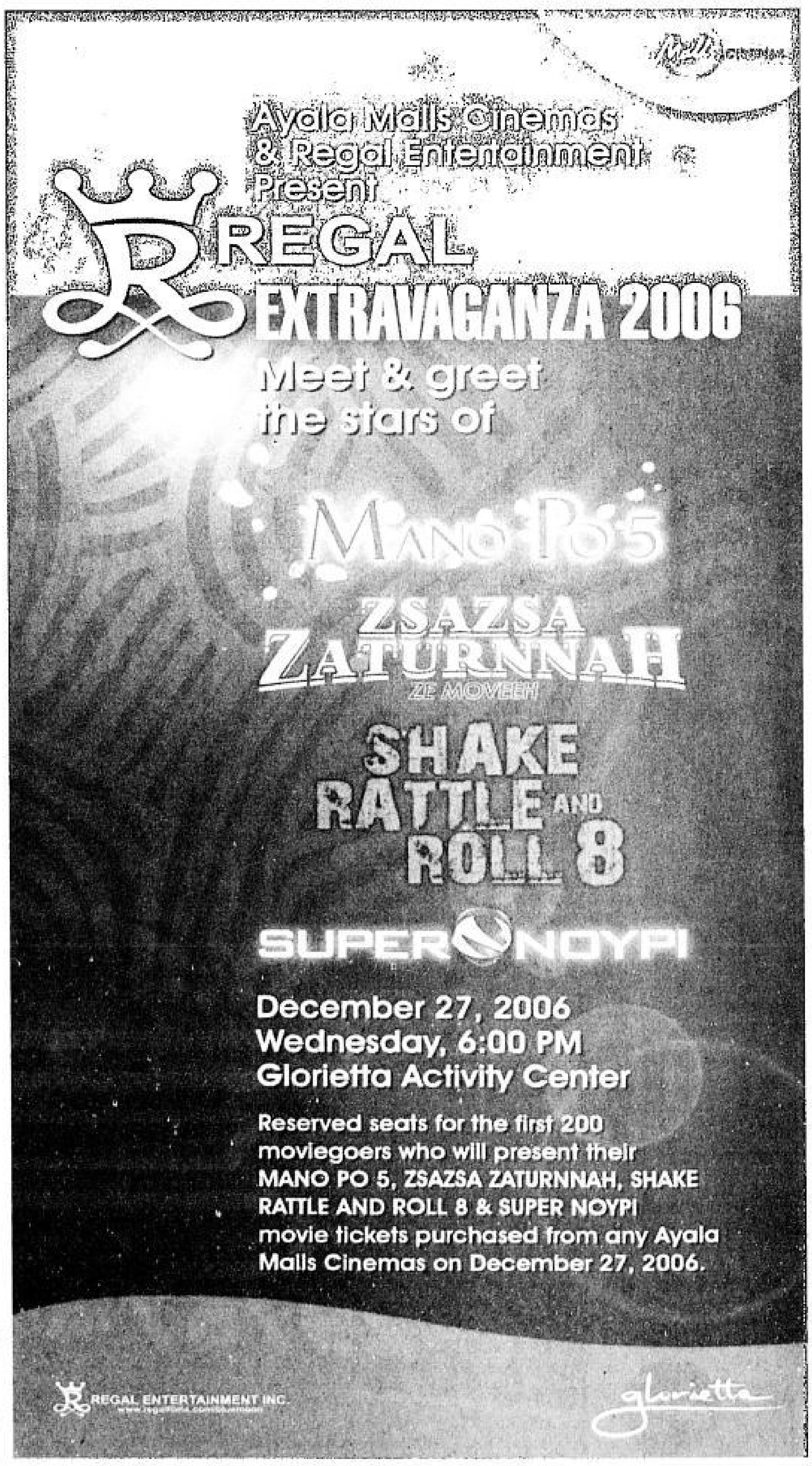
Alimall 5
KASAL, KASALI, KASALO 12:05 / 2:15 / 4:25 / 6:35 / 8:45
SUPER NOYPI 12:15 R4 / 1:35 / 3:55 / 6:15 / 8:35
LIGALIG 12:30 / 2:30 / 4:30 / 6:30 / 8:30
ENTENG KABISOTE 3 11:00 / 1:20 / 3:40 / 6:00 / 8:2[illegible]
ZSA ZSA ZATURNAH 11:55 / 2:05 / 4:15 / 6:25 / 8:35
DOLBY DIGITAL DTS SDDS

For ticket inquiries, please call TicketNet at 911-5555 or log on to www.ticketnet.com.ph

ARANETA COLISEUM
CARTOON NETWORK LIVE: CARTOONIVAL
Dec. 29, 30, Jan 1, 2 & 3 - 4:00 pm & 7:30 pm
2007 WORLD SLASHER CUP INVITATIONAL 8- COCK DERBY
JANUARY 16, 18 & 20



Rated "A" by Cinema Evaluation Board
MTRCB RATING R-13 Strictly for 13 years of age and up
CESAR MONTANO
OFFICIAL ENTRY TO METRO MANILA FILM FESTIVAL 2006
[illegible]ER 25, 2006
SUNSHINE CRUZ CELIA RODRIGUEZ JOHNNY DELGADO
LIGALIG
KATYA SANTOS BAYANI AGBAYANI JOHN REGALA
REBECCA LUSTERIO ROMMEL MONTANO ALVIN ANSON
KALILA AGUILOS & GWEN GARCI
SPECIAL PARTICIPATION DR. MANNY CALAYAN
CM FILMS, INC. PRESENTS
A CESAR MONTANO FILM "LIGALIG" STORY BY CESAR MONTANO SCREENPLAY CESAR MONTANO, WILLY LACONSAY
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GILBERTO "GIBOY" VISTAN PRODUCTION DESIGNER SAMMY ARANZAMENDEZ, PDGP
FILM EDITORS JASON CAHAPAY, ERIK TORRE OVIEDO MUSICAL DIRECTORS ITOY NIPIS, RAFFY MAGSAYSAY
MUSIC SCORE NANI NAGUIT SOUND ENGINEER RAFFY MAGSAYSAY VISUAL EFFECTS LARGER THAN LIFE
PUBLICITY AND PROMOTIONS NORMA JAPITANA LINE PRODUCER SUNSHINE MONTANO PRODUCED BY CESAR MONTANO
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ROMMEL MONTANO, BAYANI AGBAYANI
DIRECTED BY CESAR MONTANO
CM FILMS INC.
Hanford TM CALAYAN PM XXI FOREVER MEGA



Ayala Malls Cinemas & Regal Entertainment Present
REGAL EXTRAVAGANZA 2006
Meet & greet the stars of
MANO PO 5
ZSAZSA ZATURNNAH ZE MOVEEH
SHAKE RATTLE AND ROLL 8
SUPER NOYPI
December 27, 2006
Wednesday, 6:00 PM
Glorietta Activity Center
Reserved seats for the first 200 moviegoers who will present their MANO PO 5, ZSAZSA ZATURNNAH, SHAKE RATTLE AND ROLL 8 & SUPER NOYPI movie tickets purchased from any Ayala Malls Cinemas on December 27, 2006.
REGAL ENTERTAINMENT INC.
glorietta

MMTA
METRO MANILA THEATERS ASSOCIATION
MOVIE GUIDE
NOW SHOWING

SHANG CINEPLEX
1 (DOLBY) LIGALIG
2 (DOLBY) ZSA ZSA ZATURNAH
3 (DOLBY) TATLONG BARAHA
4 (DOLBY) SUPER NOYPI
PREMIERE
(DOLBY) CLOSED

CINEMA 2000
Cinema 2000 Waltermart Makati
Waltermart Center, Chino Roces Ave. cor. Antonio Arnaiz Pio del Pilar, Makati City
Tel 816.4214 / 816.4216
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
3 TATLONG BARAHA
4 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL - 8

starmall EDSA-SHAW
(Mandaluyong) tel. 7266150
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 (DOLBY DIGITAL EX) MANO PO - 3
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA

metropolis star
(ALABANG) tel. 8504285, 5453994
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
3 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
4 TATLONG BARAHA

THEATRES
ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
MANO PO - 3

PACIFIC MALL LUCENA CINEMAGIC
Pacific Mall Lucena Tel (042) 660-5271
ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
RESRVED
RESRVED

Filinvest FESTIVAL CINEMAS
(Muntinlupa) tel 850.3571 or 72
1 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL - 8
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 MANO PO - 3
5 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
6 TATLONG BARAHA
7 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
8 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
9 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
10 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3

Blue Wave MARIKINA
Sumulong Highway cor. Mayor Gil Fernando Street, Sto. Niño, Marikina City tel. 9341927
1 (DOLBY) MANO PO - 5
2 (DOLBY) TALTLONG BARAHA
3 (DOLBY) ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
4 (DOLBY) KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

SUPER CINERAMA
Isetann Cinerama Complex Recto tel 7334228
1 (DOLBY) SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 SUPER NOYPI
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
5 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

THE MARKETPLACE
Mandaluyong tel 533.3851 / 533.3856
1 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 MANO PO - 5
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

Masagana CINEMA
(Pasay) tel 833.3290 / 833.3274
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL

Center Mall Cinema
Baguio Center Mall, Magsaysay Avenue (Baguio City) tel (074)- (4449346)
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA

Jade Cinema
(Angeles City) tel (045) 887.5001 to 03
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 SUPER NOYPI
3 MANO PO - 5
4 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA

Centre Plaza Cinema
(Balanga, Bataan) tel (047) 237.7007
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA

Eastwood CINEMAS
(Eastwood City Walk 2, Eastwood City E. Rodriguez Jr. Ave (C-5) Quezon City) tel 687.6963 or 72
1 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
2 SUPER NOYPI
3 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
4 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL

CINEMA 2000
Movie Theatres of the New Millenium

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Calamba) tel (049) 545.7383
1 SHAKE, RATTLE, & ROLL
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
4

Cinema 2000 Pavilion Mall
(Biñan) tel. (049) 4111146
1 MANO PO - 3
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
4 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL

Cinema 2000 Cinemagix
(Urdaneta) tel(075) 568.6771
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL

Cinema 2000 Metrotown
(Tarlac) tel (045) 982.1729
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL
3 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
4 MANO PO - 3

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Plaridel) tel (044) 795.3320
1 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Gapan) tel. (044) 4867736
1 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3

Lianas Cinema
(Pasig) tel 640.4748
1 MATAKOT KA SA KARMA
2 SUPER NOYPI

Lianas Cinema
(Alabang) tel 850.1276
1 TATLONG BARAHA
2 ZSA ZSA ZATURNNAH
3 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
4 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO

Lianas MovieCity
(Calamba) tel (049) 545.7202
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
3 SHAKE RATTLE 7 ROLL
4 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)
5 MANO PO - 5

Fiesta World Mall
(Lipa) tel (043) 981.0790
1 MANO PO - 5
2 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
3 KASAL, KASALI, KASALO
4 SHAKE RATTLE 7 ROLL

Berma Cinema
(Baclaran) tel 879.2030 / 879.2029
1 ENTENG KABISOTE - 3
2 LIGALIG (BATANG MAYNILA)

MOVIES / SCHEDULES / PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

Italy's DJ Benny Benassi, live in Manila

BITE INTO A SLICE OF PARTY heaven as you greet the New Year. Italian DJ Benny Benassi, who conquered the dance floors worldwide with the house anthem "Satisfaction," is set to take Manila by storm. He spins at the PICC Forum on Friday, Dec. 29, in his trademark style—electro, house-tech, "dirty" and cool. Ranked no. 13 in thedjlist.com, Benassi, born in Milan in 1967, also works as a producer with his cousin Alle Benassi, a musician and arranger at Off Limits, in Reggio Emilia, Italy, the internationally successful production unit run by Larry Pignagnoli.

DJ BENASSI

In 2003, Benny was No. 1 in the Top 100 dance tracks on the Ministry of Sound Internet radio. He won DJ Mag Tune of the Year in UK, Revelation of the Year in the Italian Dance Music Awards, Dance Revelation of the Year in the Danish Music Awards, and was nominated for International Revelation of the Year in the NRJ Awards in France.

SHOW TIME

The following year, Benny won the Best Video Award at Dancestar, Miami, was number 18 (the highest new entry) in the DJ Mag Favorite DJ Poll Top 100, and received the European Border Breakers Award for Hypnotica, the Italian album that sold out in all Europe.

Call 718-1311 to 13 or (0920) 954-4244.

BLACK EYED PEAS

Global party

Nokia announces the world's biggest New Year's Eve celebration in five party capitals of the world

The Black Eyed Peas and Scissor Sisters are among the several international artists who will begin countdown to "Nokia New Year's Eve" on Dec. 31.

The event will gather revelers from Hong Kong to Rio de Janeiro. Those unable to attend in person can experience the party via television or the Internet. To orchestrate this unique celebration, Nokia has enlisted the services of Harvey Goldsmith CBE, producer of Live Aid and Live8.

Nokia New Year's Eve will travel from east to west, starting in Hong Kong's Ocean Terminal, followed by Mumbai's Andheri Stadium, the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Ipanema Beach in Rio de Janeiro, rounding off in New York.

Broadcast material available http://www.nokia.com/A4126678

Hyatt countdown

At Hyatt Regency Manila's Lobby Lounge, revelers will bid 2006 goodbye to the swinging beats of the hotel's resident all-female band, Rhythm & Babes.

The New Year's Eve celebration starts at 10:30 p.m. The Rhythm & Babes are: lead vocalist Anne Borgaily, bass guitarist Anna Treichler, lead guitarist and vocalist Eileen Macabeo, keyboardist Love Guevarra, rhythm guitarist Lulu Katigbak and drummer Anna Fenstad. Sultry singer Maricris Garcia is a featured performer.

Minimum consumable charge is Php1,000+++ per person. Call 833-1234 loc. 8070.

RHYTHM & BABES

'Cartoonival!'

Some of the world's best-loved cartoon characters invade the local scene for a week of merriment, laughter and fun in "Cartoonival! Cartoon Network Live!" from Dec. 29 to Jan. 3 at the Araneta Coliseum in Cubao, Quezon City.

Tickets are at P1,550, P1,250, P950 and P550. Call 991-5555.

Today

Up Dharma Down at '70s Bistro, Anonas, QC

Tomorrow

Brownman Revival at '70s Bistro, Anonas, QC

Dec. 29

Reggae Mistress at '70s Bistro, Anonas, QC

Dec. 30

The Jerks at '70s Bistro, Anonas, QC

Jan. 7

Piano prodigy Oliver Salonga at UP Abelardo Hall; 4 p.m. Call 724-0705.

Jan. 12

The Lettermen at the Araneta Coliseum; 8 p.m.

Jan. 13

The Lettermen at Clark Expo in Pampanga; 8 p.m.

Jan. 14

The Lettermen at St. La Salle in Bacolod; 8 p.m.

Oliver Salonga at UP Abelardo Hall; 4 p.m. Call 724-0705.

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3. Choose **Full Track Download**
4. Select **What's New**
5. Download the Song of your choice

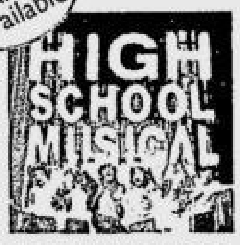
P50/download

TO WATCH MUSIC VIDEOS

WALTZ by Hale

HALLELUJAH by Bamboo

Also Available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3. Choose **Music Videos**
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* Streaming fee is P15/30mins.

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Kung Ayaw Mo Sa Akin by **Sugarfree**

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Sony Ericsson K610i
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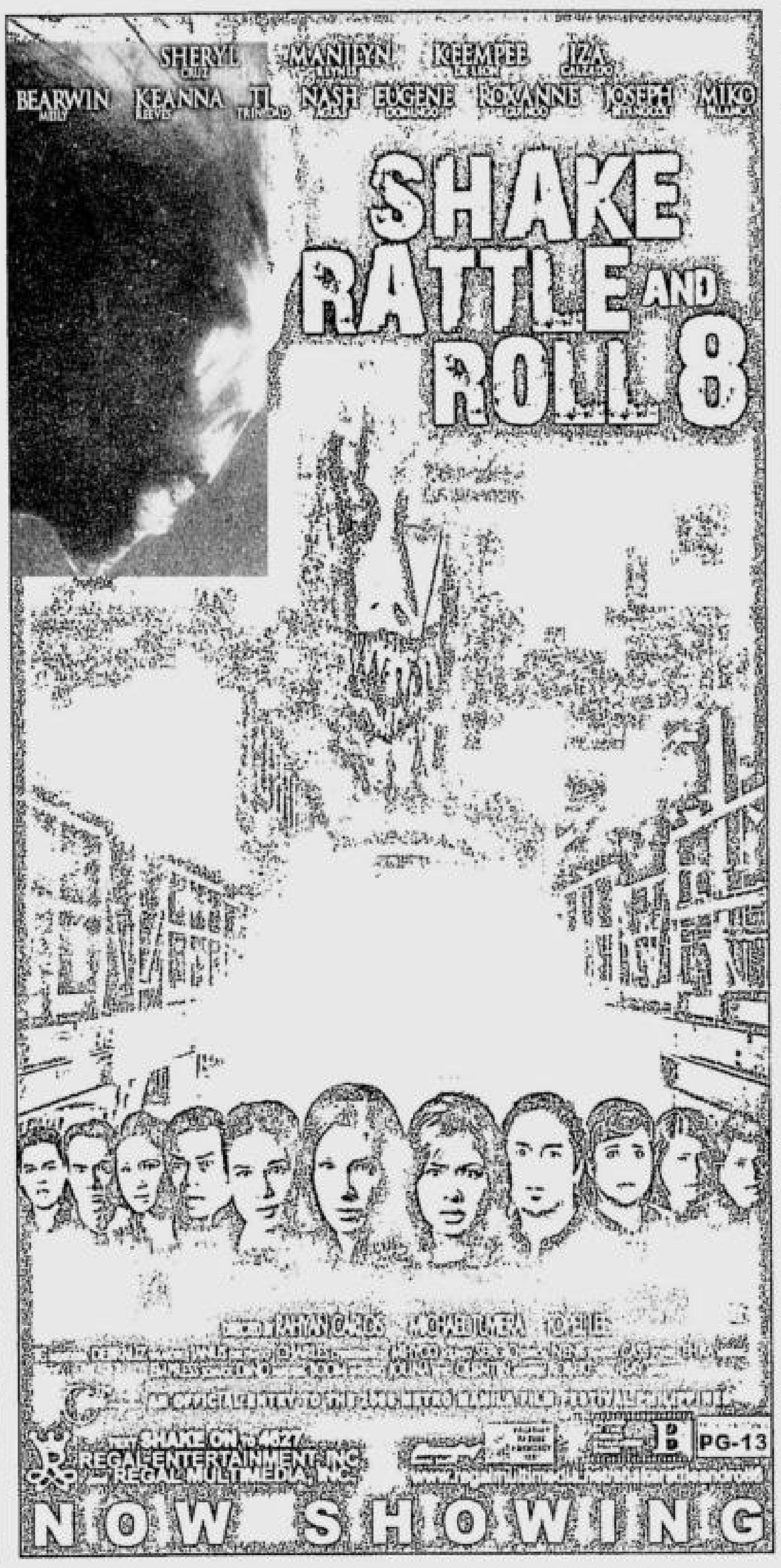

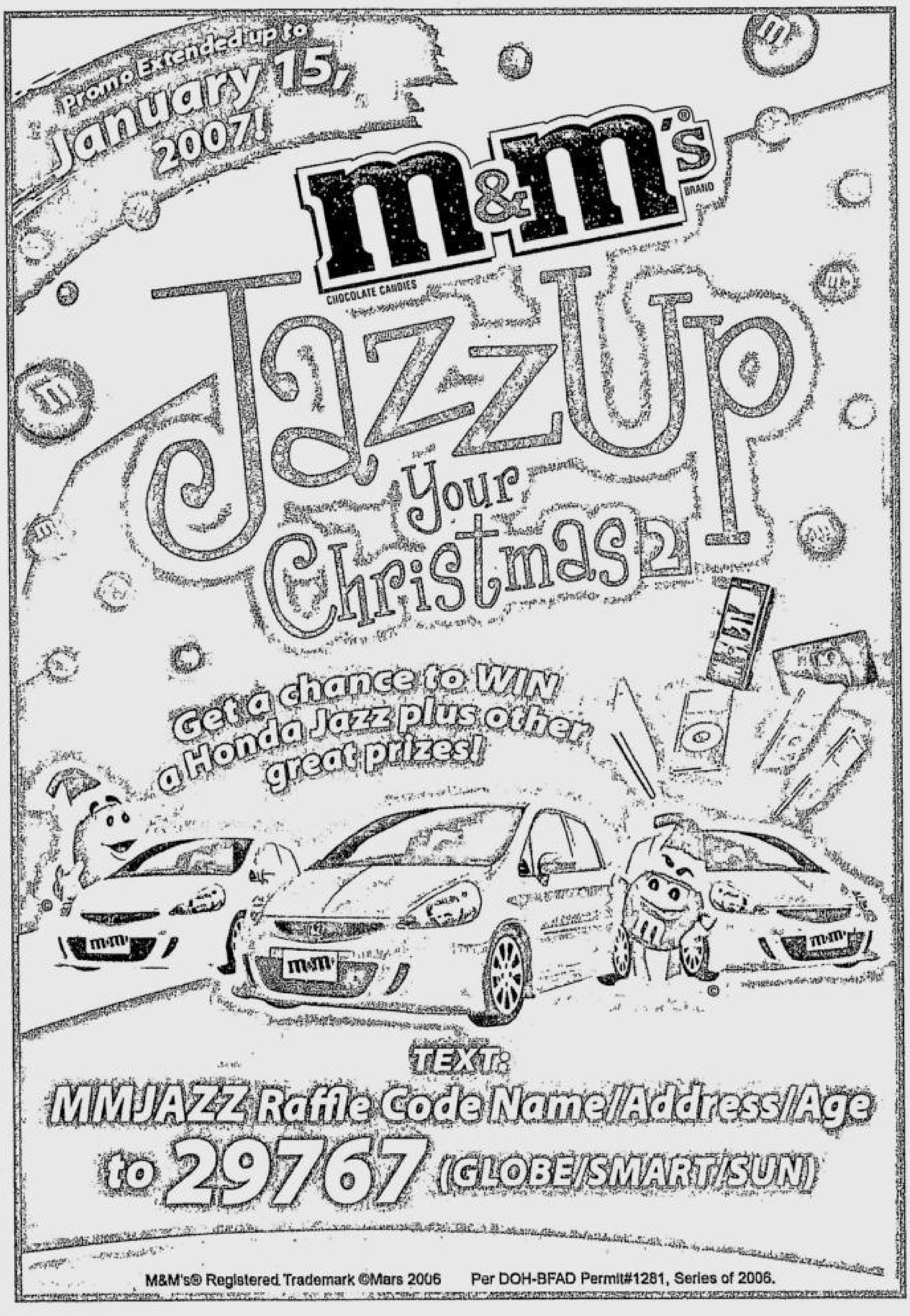

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